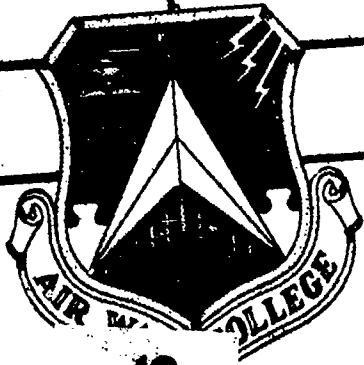


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# AIR WAR COLLEGE

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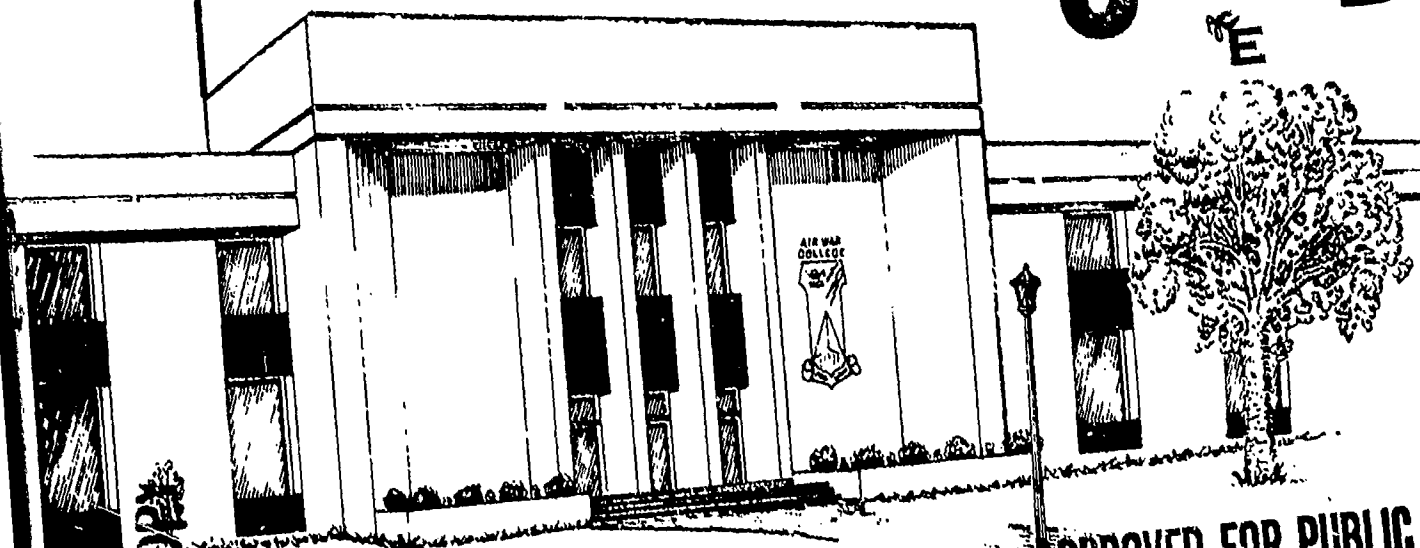
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WAR PLANNING ASSUMPTIONS AND ERRORS IN MILITARY STRATEGY

By LT COL GALE E. HEAVILIN, USMC

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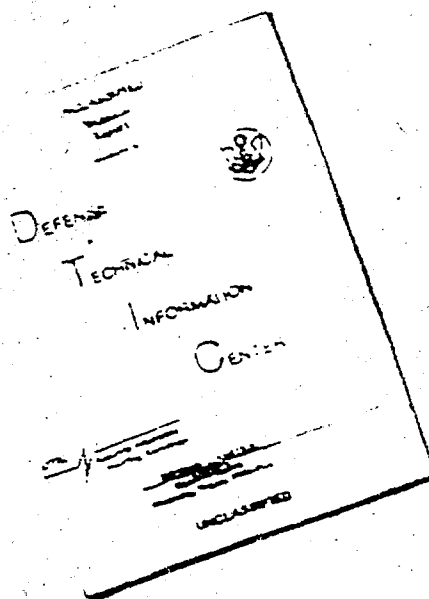
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WAR PLANNING ASSUMPTIONS AND ERRORS IN MILITARY STRATEGY

by

Gale E. Heavilin  
Lieutenant Colonel, USMC

A RESEARCH REPORT SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY  
IN  
FULFILLMENT OF THE RESEARCH  
REQUIREMENT

Research Advisor: Dr. Joe Strange

MAXWELL AIR FORCE BASE, ALABAMA

March 1986

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AIR WAR COLLEGE RESEARCH REPORT ABSTRACT

TITLE: War Planning Assumptions and Errors in Military Strategy

AUTHOR: Gale E. Heavilin, Lieutenant Colonel, US Marine Corps

Historical remarks provide outline of objectives, strategies, forces, and planning by opponents in two pivotal military events of the 20th century; the Guadalcanal Campaign and the Battle of Dien Bien Phu. Assessment of the outcome for each event completes the basis for the author's evaluation of planning assumptions. Conclusion that classic errors in military thinking produce faulty planning assumptions, are present in every conflict, yield unexpected results, and are avoidable has pertinence to current and future military planners and commanders.

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Lieutenant Colonel Gale E. Heavilin (B.A., Central Missouri State University; M.S. US Naval Postgraduate School) has been interested in military strategy since he studied the American Civil War as an undergraduate. He has worked on amphibious operations with the military forces of Japan, Korea, the Philippines, South Vietnam, Thailand, Malaysia, Australia, Kenya, Somalia, Turkey, Greece, and France. He served with the First Marine Aircraft Wing in South Vietnam as a helicopter gunship pilot in 1968-69, commanded a Marine Attack Helicopter Squadron at Camp Pendleton in 1981-82, and was Executive Officer of a Marine Amphibious Unit in 1983-84. He was an action officer for East Asia/Pacific matters and Head, Eastern Regional Branch, Plans Division, Headquarters, US Marine Corps in 1984-85. He never travels without Sun Tzu. He holds the Meritorious Service Medal and the Air Medal. Lieutenant Colonel Heavilin is a graduate of the Air War College, Class of 1986.



Map 2



Guadalcanal, Solomon Islands, and Rabaul

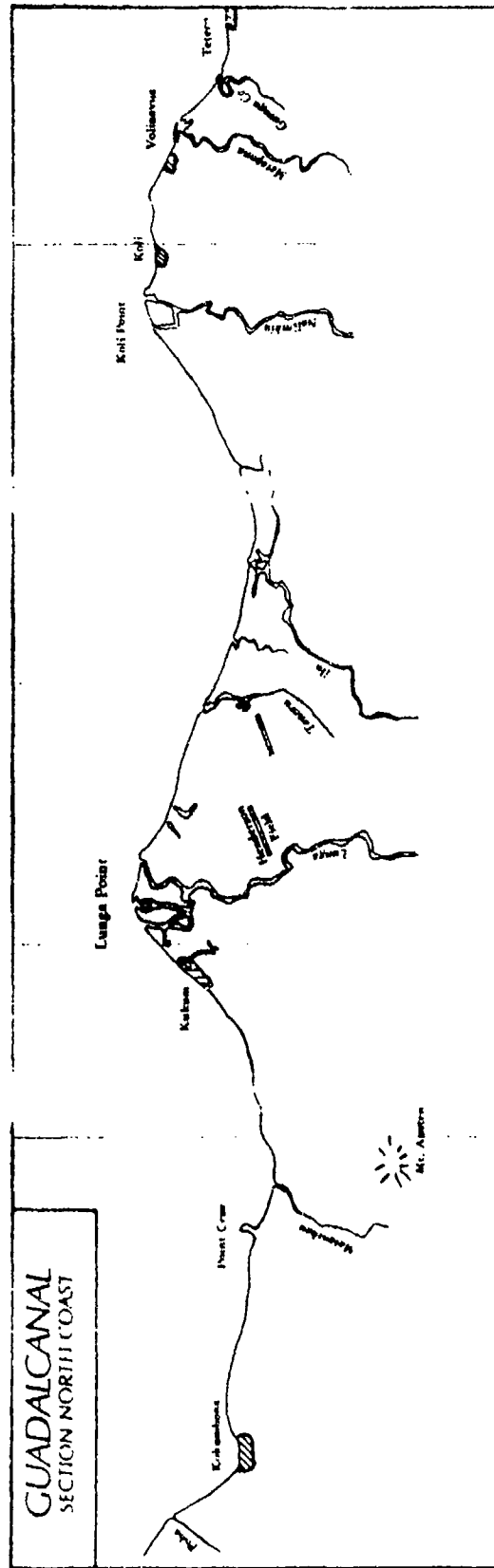
Reference: Dull, Paul S., A Battle History of the Imperial Japanese Navy (1941-1945), Naval Institute Press, Annapolis, 1978, p. 181.



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Reference: Merrillat, Herbert C., Guadalcana! Remembered, Dodd, Mead and Co., New York, 1982, p. xviii.

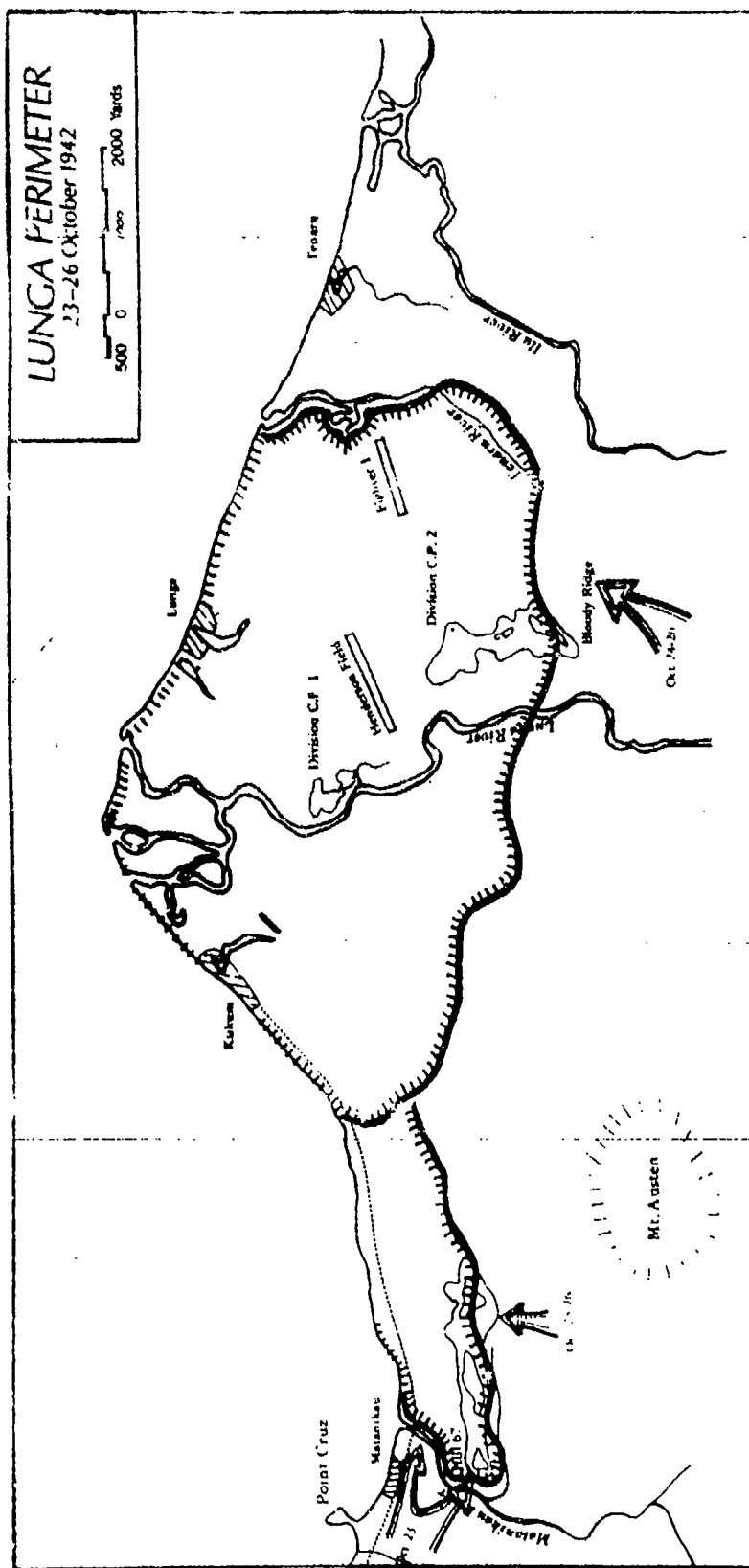
Map 4



Guadalcanal, North Coast - Area where most of the fighting took place

Reference: Merrillat, Herbert C., Guadalcanal Remembered, Dodd, Mead and Co., New York, 1982, p. xx.

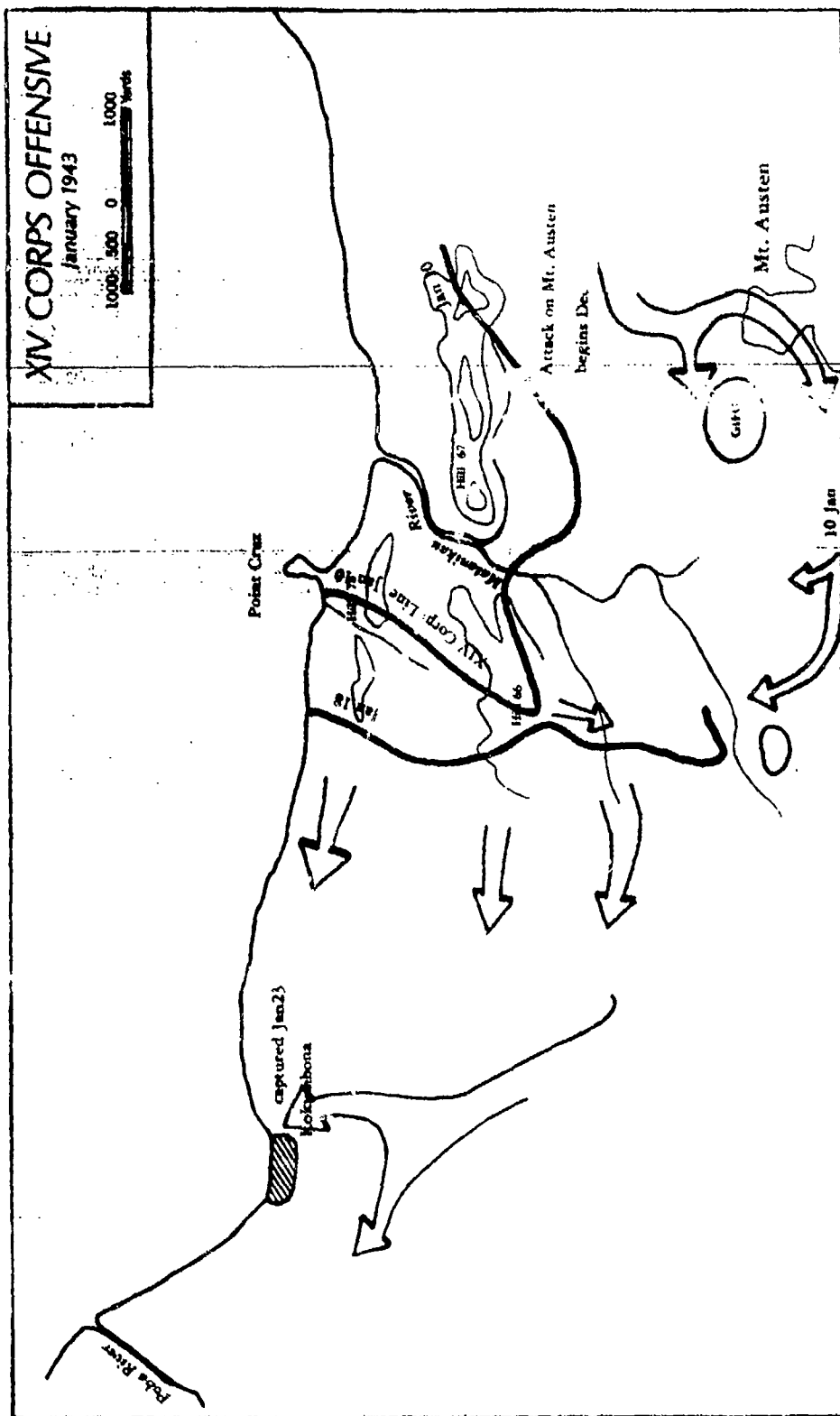
Map 5



Guadalcanal - The First Marine Division perimeter and extension during the October fighting

Reference: Merrillat, Herbert C., Guadalcanal Remembered, Dodd, Mead and Co., New York, 1982, p. 194.

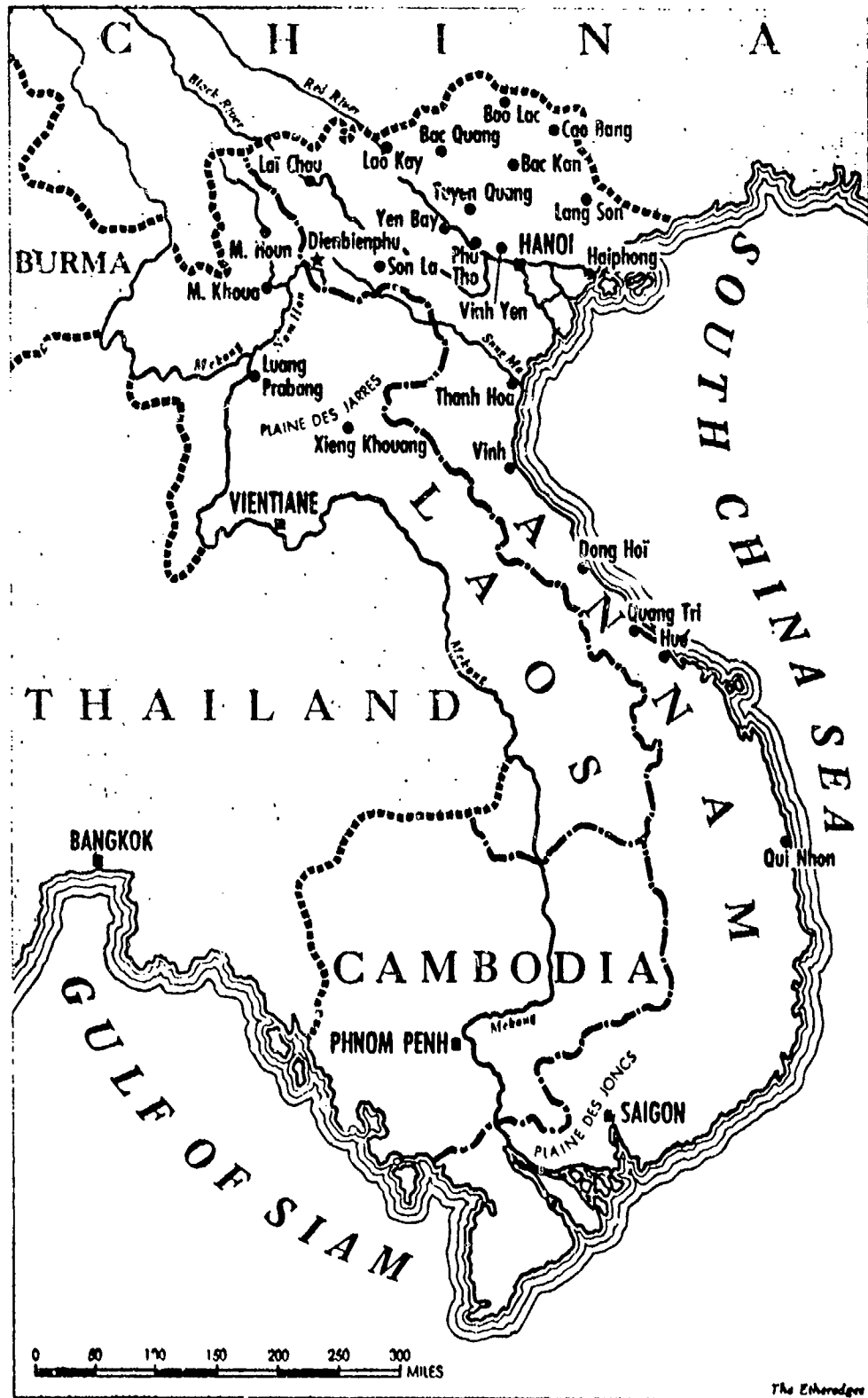
Map 6



Guadalcanal - American Offensive January 1943

Reference: Merrillat, Herbert C., Guadalcanal Remembered, Dodd, Mead and Co., New York, 1982, p. 194.

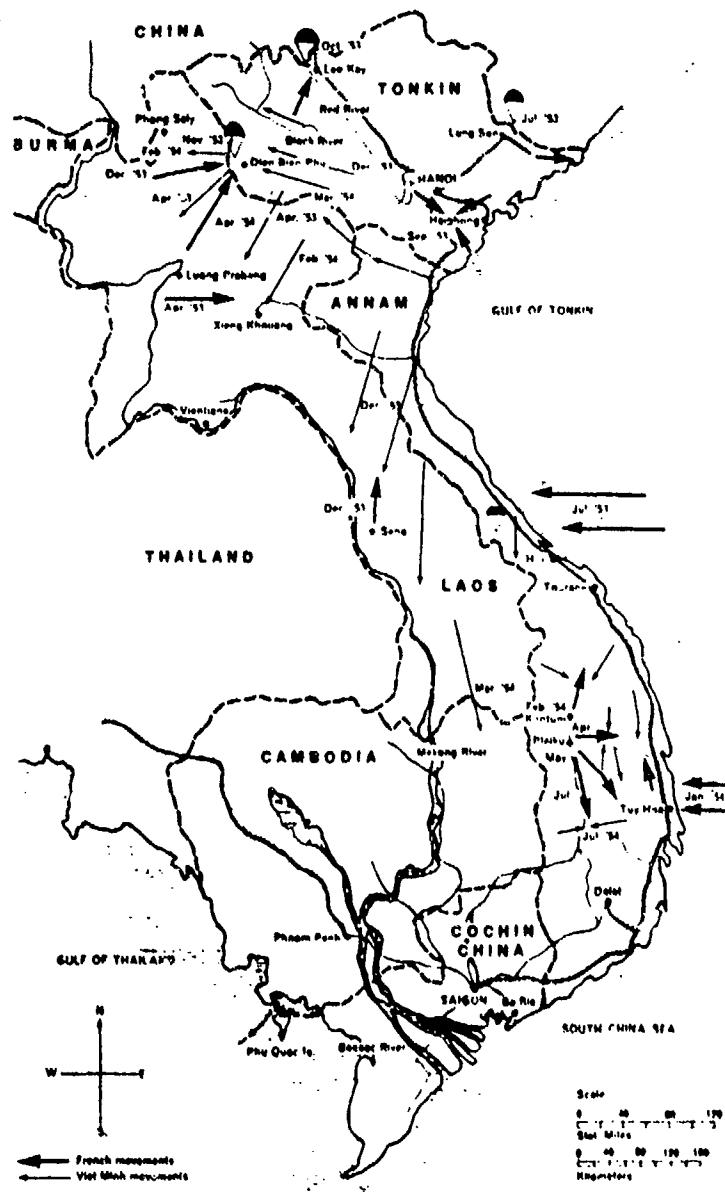
Map 7



Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia

Reference: Roy, Jules, The Battle of Dien Bien Phu, Harper and Roe, New York, 1963, p. xxii.

Map 8



Giap's Countermoves to Navarre, 1953-1954

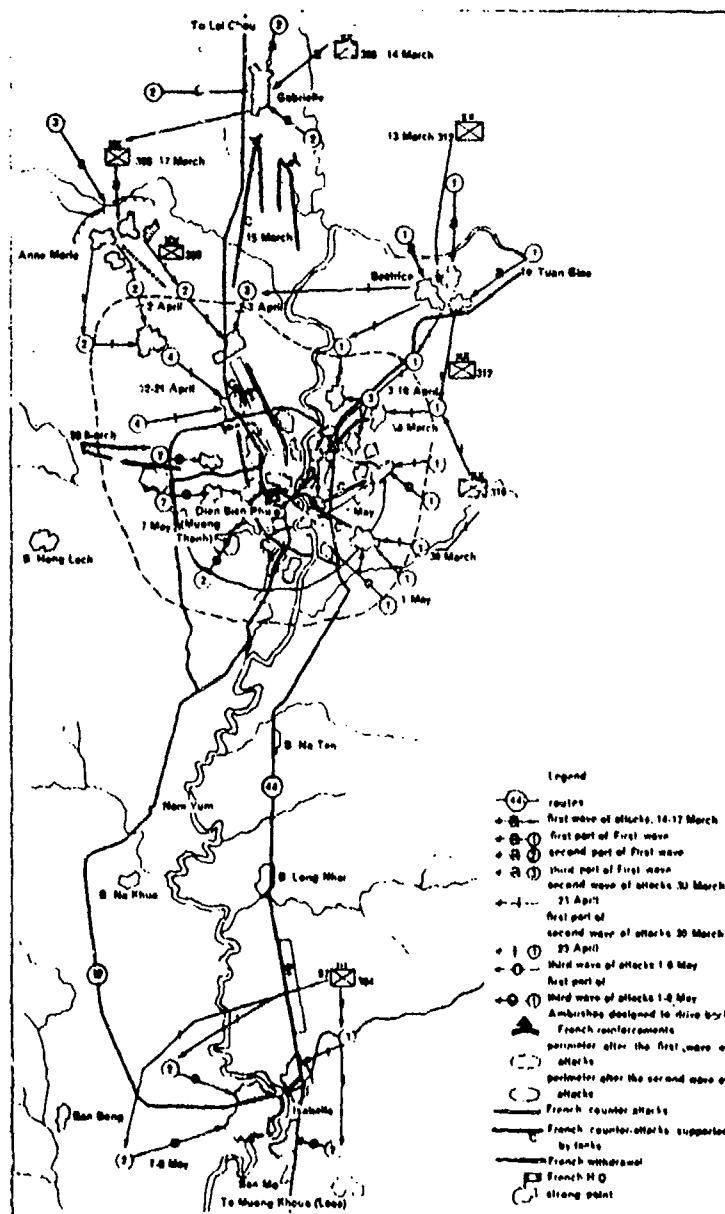
Reference: O'Neill, Robert J., General Giap, Politician and Strategist, Praeger, New York, 1969, p. 127.

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## Dien Bien Phu - The Preliminary Moves

Reference: O'Neill, Robert J., General Giap, Politician and Strategist, Praeger, New York, 1969, p. 140.

Map 10



Dien Bien Phu - The Battle, 13 March - 8 May 1954.

Reference: O'Neill, Robert J., General Giap, Politician and Strategist, Praeger, New York, 1969, p. 153.



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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Those who do not know the conditions of mountains and forests, hazardous defiles, marshes and swamps, cannot conduct the march of an army.

- Sun Tzu

There is no question that Japan's doom was sealed with the closing of the struggle for Guadalcanal.

- Raizo Tanaka

About ten thousand US Marines assaulted Guadalcanal on 7 August 1942, and by evening they had overrun the Japanese camp, occupied the unfinished airfield, and forced the 2500 Japanese labor troops and a guard unit of 150 troops into scattered flight. The remaining six thousand men of the First Marine Division assaulted Tulagi, where most of the regular Japanese troops were located. After a vicious battle, Tulagi was secured by midnight 8-9 August (1:184).

The swift Japanese response to the American invasion of Guadalcanal blunted the Allied initiative. The American carrier force had withdrawn to the southeast on the evening of 8 August (5:184). The Eighth Fleet, Outer South Seas Force's "splendid defeat" of the US Navy in the First Battle of the Solomon Sea (the Battle of Savo Island for the US Navy) on 9 August compelled the American transports to pull away from Guadalcanal before they were unloaded (5:194). The Marines were left with scant supplies, the presumed

loss of air and sea support, and little hope for reinforcements or resupply (14:36). In three days the Japanese had converted the Allied invasion into a defensive operation. By October-November the decisive engagements for control of Guadalcanal were being fought (5:166). Between 3 and 8 February 1943 over ten thousand emaciated and exhausted Japanese troops were evacuated from Guadalcanal. They left behind over twenty thousand of their dead or missing comrades. The Japanese defense perimeter had been broken (1:260).

You must take care to choose an elevated position, in order to fall prey upon the enemy with greater advantage. But the most important point is not to gather your army on a plain situated at the foot of a mountain which the enemy might be able to occupy unimpeded; for with his artillery he would crush you from the neighboring heights; in vain would you try to prevent his batteries from hitting you ceaselessly and without impediments.

- Machiavelli, The Art of War, Book IV

If he comes down into the basin, we can smash him.

- Colonel Christian de Castries to  
Major General Rene Cogny

In May 1953 General Henri Navarre took command of French military forces in Indochina. He quickly developed a strategy which would allow France to negotiate an end to its war with the Viet Minh forces of General Vo Nguyen Giap. His plan to inflict maximum damage on the Viet Minh consisted of five points:

reconstitute the French Expeditionary Force while avoiding the main body of the enemy forces; continue major pacification actions in the Red River delta; prevent enemy offensive operations by smashing them before they start; destroy Viet Minh elements in the Southern Highlands; and seek a major set-piece battle by attacking first the enemy's rice granaries, then his reserves of men, and finally his main battle force (14:124).

General Navarre's plan worked but he got his teeth kicked in. The set-piece battle he anticipated turned out to be a 56-day siege in which the Viet Minh encircled then strangled his French Expeditionary Force. About six thousand members of the Expeditionary Force were listed as dead or missing (2:484) and the estimated ten thousand who surrendered were marched into Tonkin prison camps (16:287).

Why did these unexpected disasters happen? Why did the Japanese fail to eject the Americans from Guadalcanal when a breach of their "impregnable defense perimeter" would mean the eventual collapse of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere? Why did the Navarre Plan to bring the Viet Minh to heel at Dien Bien Phu produce instead a military debacle labelled as one of the biggest military blunders in French history (16:291)?

The Japanese lost the campaign for Guadalcanal and the French lost the Battle of Dien Bien Phu because they made classic military errors. They made some of the same

errors which have led countless other commanders to defeat in conflicts recorded over fifty centuries; errors neither confined to army commanders nor restricted to land warfare; errors which the United States repeated in Vietnam; errors which we cannot afford to make in the future, be it in Central Europe, Central America, the North Atlantic, Southwest Asia, or Outer Space. These classic military errors include being unclear about objectives, underestimating an opponent, overestimating one's own military capability, failing to maintain adequate lines of communication, and ignoring significant limitations on one's own military power.

→ This paper analyzes and assesses opposing strategies for two pivotal conflicts of the mid-twentieth century. Looking first at Guadalcanal and ~~then~~ at Dien Bien Phu, the analysis shows basic strategy, highlights key planning assumptions, and identifies force structures. The *author* assessment reviews the results of conflict as a point of departure for evaluating the effectiveness of each strategy.

This paper concludes that battles are lost and campaigns fail because commanders make classic, but avoidable, errors in military thinking from which come the faulty planning assumptions upon which their losing strategies are based. → (to 5)

(cont.)  
→ He - It shows that Japan failed to hold Guadalcanal because <sup>(the</sup> Imperial General <sup>HQ</sup> Headquarters did not have an integrated strategy for defense of the southeast perimeter of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere and it chose positions in the southern Solomons that over-reached the range of land-based air power. <sup>He</sup> Japanese commanders grossly underestimated the will and competence of the Americans, they greatly overestimated their own capabilities, they relied upon the power of the bushido spirit to overcome logistic weakness, and they overlooked significant limitations on their land-based fire power and communications. The American assumption that it was the key to the campaign led to the decision to hold Henderson Field at all costs. Thus were the Japanese prevented from establishing air superiority over Guadalcanal. The Marines' ferocious defense bought sufficient time for US Naval forces and land-based Army Air Forces to stop the "Tokyo Express" and exhaust Japanese interest in resupplying and reinforcing the Japanese 17th Army.

This paper further concludes that the French beat themselves at Dien Bien Phu because they lost sight of any clear war aims in Indochina; <sup>they</sup> underestimated the capabilities of the Viet Minh; <sup>they</sup> overestimated their own capabilities while ignoring significant limitations on their own military power; <sup>they</sup> did not use to advantage the ter-

(cont)

rain on which they chose to accept battle; and they failed to plan adequately for retreat. Conversely, the Viet Minh understood the real object of the war--control of the major cities--and developed a strategy to achieve that objective and harnessed the cohesive unity of the National Liberation Army to defeat the better equipped, more mobile French Expeditionary Force.



## CHAPTER II

### THE CAMPAIGN FOR GUADALCANAL

#### Background

Admiral Yamamoto's devastating attack on Pearl Harbor kicked off the Japanese plan to establish the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. Following the Combined Fleet's spectacular success at Pearl Harbor, the Japanese moved quickly to convert their vision of resource independence and regional hegemony into reality. In the six months after 7 December 1941, the "First Operational Stage" of the Imperial General Headquarters' plan unfolded more easily than their wildest dreams (9:40). Japan eagerly gobbled up the Philippines, Malaya, Borneo, the Celebes, Timor, Sumatra, and Rabaul before capturing Java and invading Burma (9:8). At midyear 1942, the Japanese could set the occupation of the southern regions, including Burma and much of New Guinea, against the one major defeat at Midway. In August, the American forces secured a position on Guadalcanal and thereafter the picture changed rapidly. During the crucial campaign for Guadalcanal neither side was willing to give up Guadalcanal, but neither side would be able to drive the other off the island. Both sides understood its strategic importance (1:194). The US Navy was determined to fight the Japanese in the South Pacific by garrisoning island bases to extend American sea and air

power into areas held by the Japanese. Admiral Ernest J. King, Commander in Chief of the US Fleet, saw the mission of the Pacific Fleet as checking the Japanese southward advance and rapidly changing over to the offensive to drive them back (5:4).

### Japanese Objectives

The Imperial Japanese government decided to go to war with the Allied powers to secure raw materials and population resources of the Dutch East Indies and Southeast Asia. The basic plan was to conduct a limited war in which Japan would quickly conquer the holdings of the Colonial powers in the Far East, establish an impregnable defense perimeter on both flanks and then repulse expected counter-attacks in the hope that the Allies would accept the Japanese fait accompli and negotiate peace on that basis (9:5).

By mid-1942 the high Command's specific objective was to thwart the threat posed by the growing Allied forces under General MacArthur in Australia and Admiral Nimitz in Hawaii. The Imperial Japanese Army and the Imperial Japanese Navy had different strategies on how to achieve that objective. However, they shared a common interest in the southern Solomons because integral to their different strategies were the seaplane base at Tulagi and, later, the airfield on Guadalcanal. After the American landings there

the Imperial Japanese Army and the Imperial Japanese Navy shared another common objective: they both wanted to dislodge the US Marines from Guadalcanal.

#### Japanese Strategies

The Navy's strategy was to interdict MacArthur's line of supply from the United States (5:176). The General Staff intended to interpose an interlocking web of fortified air and submarine bases astride the lines of communication between the US and Australia by completing the operation to capture Port Moresby and then invading New Caledonia, Fiji, and Samoa (9:41). Concerned with the possibility of an American counterattack in home waters after Midway, the Navy concerned itself with defense, support of ongoing operations, and research for a successful decisive battle (1:175).

The Army strategy was to extend the southern perimeter to include even north Australia. They intended to take Port Moresby by mounting as one operation the capture of Guadalcanal--to establish protection from the east--and the invasion of the Papuan peninsula (1:176).

The Army view prevailed. Although it was standard Japanese military doctrine to make advances only under air cover, both Guadalcanal and the islands in Milne Bay that were keys to the Port Moresby operation were beyond adequate

air cover. Thus, the naval forces used to support these campaigns were extremely vulnerable, since Midway had decimated Japanese carrier-based air power (1:176).

After the American seizure of Guadalcanal, the Japanese strategy was to reinforce and hold their position, which meant that they had to control the seas around it (1:194), then use army forces to recapture the island without delay (17:196) by destroying the Marine units and gaining control of the airfield (17:209).

On the afternoon of August 10 the chiefs of the Army and Navy General Staffs outlined a new Central Agreement for New Guinea and the Solomons "in accordance with the changed situation" which stressed continued pressure on Port Moresby and directed the Japanese Seventeenth Army under General Hyukatake to recapture Tulagi and Guadalcanal immediately with forces to be made available. The Army section of Imperial General Headquarters (IGHQ) quickly assigned the 35th Infantry Brigade (in the Palaus) and two reinforced regiments (Aoba in the Philippines and Ichiki on Guam) to the Seventeenth Army order of battle (4:78).

Two days later General Sugiyama, the Vice Chief of Army General Staff, advised Hyukatake, then on Rabaul, that:

The scope of the operations for recapture of strategic points in the Solomon Islands will be decided by the Army Commander on the basis of his estimate of the enemy situation. General Headquarters believes it is feasible to use the 35th Infantry Brigade and Aoba Detachment if

the situation demands. However, since tactical opportunity is a primary consideration under existing conditions, it is considered preferable, if possible, to recapture these areas promptly, using only the Ichiki Detachment and Special Naval Landing Forces.

This dispatch reflects the incredible overconfidence which then enveloped IGHQ and foreshadows the policy of piecemeal commitment (4:79) which was to follow.

KA was the code name for the joint Army-Navy plan to recapture Guadalcanal. The Ichiki Detachment of 2400 represented the Army's initial contribution. It was to be supported by much the greater part of the Combined Fleet. By August 19, Admiral Yamamoto had gathered ships from all over Greater East Asia and had marshalled his forces at Truk. To these could be added the Southeast Area Force at Rabaul consisting of the Eleventh Air Fleet and the Eighth Fleet.

Combined Fleet's carrier aircraft were to clear Solomons waters of all American surface ships.

Eleventh Air Fleet's planes were to hammer Marine positions on Guadalcanal by day.

Eighth Fleet's men-o-war were to batter the Marines by night.

All of this to support 2400 troops reflected the Army's unshakeable conviction that there could not be more than a few thousand Americans on Guadalcanal, and the Navy's fixed determination to lure out and destroy the American Fleet (6:116).

Some at IGHQ vigorously opposed commitment of "only the Ichiki Detachment and Special Naval Landing Forces." One of these officers (formerly Tojo's staff secretary and currently Chief of the Administrative Division, Army Section, IGHQ) was Colonel Susumu Nishiura. When he heard of the plan, he recalled "what had happened so often before; at Nomonhan, where we fought the Russians, and later, time after time in China, when we had committed forces inadequate to the task" (4:79).

So perturbed was Nishiura at the prospect that he called Premier and Defense Minister Tojo at his residence on a scrambler telephone. "But he (Tojo) replied that he could do nothing; that the decision was General Sugiyama's; that he would not interfere." Nishiura then sought an audience with his Chief. Sugiyama listened quietly, and said: "The orders have been issued. They cannot now be rescinded." The Colonel returned to his office. "Nothing more could be done. Would it not have been better to wait a few days to

collect a larger force, and thus not repeat our previous mistake? Still, I could but hope for the success of Colonel Ichiki" (4:79).

### Japanese Forces

#### Imperial Japanese Navy Forces

By 23 August Allied Air reconnaissance reports led to the estimate that there were 3 or 4 aircraft carriers, 1 or 2 battleships, from 7 to 15 light and heavy cruisers, from 10 to 20 destroyers, and 15 or more transports, cargo ships, and oilers at Rabaul (13:99). In fact, for the Second Battle of the Solomon Sea, 23-25 August, the Japanese assembled an array of 58 ships with 177 carrier-based planes. They assembled like numbers for the Battle of the Santa Cruz Islands, 25-27 October and the Third Battle of the Solomon Sea, 13-15 November as shown in the summary below.

<u>Ships</u> (1:203,234,248)	<u>23 Aug</u>	<u>26 Oct</u>	<u>12 Nov</u>
Heavy Carriers	2	2	
Light/Escort Carriers	3	2	1
Battleships	4	4	4
Heavy Cruisers	13	8	7
Light Cruisers	3	4	3
Descroyers	30	39	36
Transports	3		11
Total	58	59	62

#### Aircraft

Carrier-based (12:234)	177 (1:197)	135 (1:230)	95
Land-based (12:234)	160 (13:99)	220 (12:207)	215

Land-based naval air support was provided by 50 to 200 fighters and bombers of the 25th and 26th Air Flotillas of the 11th Air Fleet, which operated from the Vunakanau and Lakunai airbases near Rabaul, 600 miles north of Guadalcanal (12:234).

#### Special Naval Landing Forces

In all, about 3,100 SNLF troops saw action during the campaign (13:228). They were provided by Third Kure, Fifth Yokosuka, and the Fifth and Sixth Saseko Units (4:275,280,281).

#### Command Elements

Combined Fleet	(Adm Yamamoto)	Truk
Southeast Area Force	(VAdm Tsukahara)	Rabaul
Second Fleet	(VAdm Kondo)	
Third Fleet	(Adm Nagumo)	
Fourth Fleet	(VAdm Inoue)	
Eighth Fleet	(VAdm Mikawa)	

Rear Admiral Raizo Tanaka, who ran the "Tokyo Express" and the evacuation of Guadalcanal, commanded the Convoy/Destroyer Escort Force of Vice Admiral Mikawa's Eighth Fleet, Outer South Seas Force, Reinforcement Force. He used at various times nine to eleven destroyers as escorts for three to eleven transports (1:205,249). After the Third Battle of the Solomon Sea in mid-November he used destroyers to reinforce/resupply the 17th Army.



### Imperial Japanese Army Forces

The additional forces assigned to the 17th Army on 10 August did not greatly improve General Hyakutake's situation. The 35th Brigade was in the Palaus and one of the infantry regiments was in the Philippines. The Unit nearest the scene of the action was Colonel Ichiki's Force at Guam (4:78). Moreover, the 50,000 men comprising the 17th Army were widely dispersed. The 2d Division--called the Sendai after the city near Tokyo in which it was recruited--was in Java and the Philippines; the 38th or Nagoya Division was in the Dutch Indies; some 17th Army antitank units were as far away as Manchuria; and other units were engaged in New Guinea (6:109). The flow of 17th Army forces into Guadalcanal is depicted below.

#### IMPERIAL JAPANESE ARMY FORCE

<u>DATE</u>	<u>FORCE</u>	<u>STRENGTH</u>
18 Aug	Adv Echelon, Ichiki Force (13:95)	1,000
29 Aug-		
11 Sep	Kawaguchi Force (13:112,114)	6,000+
Mid Sep	Fourth Infantry(-), 2d Division(13:139)	700
Mid Sep-		
15 Oct	Second (Sendai) Division (13:139)	20,000
9 Oct	HQ, Seventeenth Army (4:147)	600
28 Oct-		
10 Nov	38th (Nagoya) Division (-) (4:189)	1,300
Mid Nov	Elements, 38th Division (13:186-188)	4,000

By mid-October the 17th Army on Guadalcanal included Army Headquarters, the 2d Division, two battalions of the 38th Division and the survivors of the Ichiki and Kawaguchi Forces.

In addition, there were present one regiment and three batteries of heavy field artillery, two battalions and one battery of field anti-aircraft artillery, one mortar battalion, one tank company, and three rapid-fire gun battalions. Engineer, transport, and medical troops were also on the island (13:139). The 2d Division included the 4th, 16th, and 29th Infantry Regiments and the 38th Division included the 228th, 229th and 230th Infantry Regiments (13:238). A comparison of estimated and actual Japanese and American troop strength on Guadalcanal-Tulagi on important dates is shown at Appendix A.

#### Japanese Planning

By taking the southernmost of the Solomons, the Japanese went beyond their original basic war plans. But the need to strengthen the defense perimeter against the growing forces of the enemy in Australia, to deny the Allies an island route to Rabaul, and to capture Port Moresby made it seem necessary. "Victory Fever"--feelings of invincibility among many Japanese, both military and civilian, brought on by Japan's spectacular military successes since Pearl Harbor--made such a move seem not only possible, but inevitable.

The unexpected news from Tulagi that the island was under heavy attack from both air and sea, that a great fleet was assaulting Guadalcanal, and that hostile landings were imminent (4:42) did not unduly alarm IGHQ. The Army General

Staff was surprised to find that the Navy had been building an airfield on Guadalcanal. An intelligence report from the Japanese Military Attache in Moscow claimed there were only 2000 Americans involved and that they intended to destroy the airfield and withdraw. Believing this report, IGHQ concluded that the enemy operation was nothing but a reconnaissance-in-force. However, both Army and Navy agreed that the Americans should be ousted before they could put the airfield into operation (6:74).

The Chief of the Army General Staff, General Sugiyama, began hunting for a unit to do the job. The Chief of the Naval General Staff, Admiral Nagano, approved a plan from Vice Admiral Mikawa, Commander of the Eighth Fleet at Rabaul, for a night surface attack against the American fleet. Next, Nagano directed Combined Fleet to give first priority to the recapture of Guadalcanal. Admiral Yamamoto immediately ordered Mikawa to attack the ships at Guadalcanal and Tulagi with all available land-based bombers (1:184). He then ordered all available ships and planes to prepare for a decisive counterattack (4:45) and set up a supreme Southeast Area Force, putting Vice Admiral Tsukahara, then commander of the Eleventh Air Fleet on Saipan, in charge of it. Tsukahara moved his command to Rabaul the next day and there superseded Mikawa (6:74).

Admiral Yamamoto characteristically considered the Solomons invasion as one more chance to destroy the enemy fleet. It was not Guadalcanal that was important to him; it was the fact that the American Navy was gathered there in force and could be annihilated in a decisive battle (6:74).

The Navy had kept secret from the Army the full extent of the Midway disaster and had inflated American carrier and aircraft losses there to such an extent that the army hierarchy was convinced the US Navy had been reduced to a condition of hopeless impotence. From information supplied them by the Navy, Army planners had concluded that the Americans would not be able to mount a serious offensive in the Pacific prior to early 1943. The flurry in the Solomons did not suggest the need to revise this estimate (4:44).

Thus, the importance of Guadalcanal to Japan's military leaders: General Sugiyama, echoed by General Hyakutake, thought it a mere nuisance which might interfere with the Port Moresby operation and must therefore be quickly squelched. Admirals Nagano and Yamamoto saw it as an opportunity to regain the naval edge, and some of the considerable "face," lost at Midway (6:75).

#### Assumptions

The assumptions upon which Japanese strategy for

Guadalcanal was based had both political and military aspects. Political assumptions include the following:

The Japanese could conduct a war on their own terms and could limit such a war, in terms of space and time, to their own desires (4:4).

The Japanese plan to establish the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere could be achieved with a limited war (9:5).

The Americans would quickly tire of war (7:41).

The Allies would be unable to penetrate the defensive perimeter of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere (9:5).

The Allies would accept the Japanese conquests as a fait accompli and negotiate peace on that basis (9:5).

A number of military assumptions were made by the Japanese pertaining to general strategy and land, sea and air operations. These military assumptions include:

#### General

The power vacuum that existed in the Eastern New Guinea-Solomons area through the end of July 1942 was nothing to worry about. The Americans would remain on the defensive in the Pacific since they were committed to the support of Great Britain and the mounting of a "Second Front" in Europe and were still reeling from the shocks of defeat at Pearl Harbor and Bataan (8:5).

After Coral Sea and Midway the Allies could do little against the Japanese position in the southern Solomons.

The Americans would not be able to mount a serious offensive campaign in the Pacific prior to early 1943 (4:44).

MacArthur would counterattack toward Tokyo through New Guinea and the Philippines and Nimitz would counterattack toward Tokyo through the Central Pacific (1:80-81).

The Solomon-Bismarck line was an unlikely route of advance for the Allies toward Tokyo.

Japanese positions in New Guinea and southern Solomons could be established and maintained beyond the effective range of land-based air power.

The key to success in the campaign for the southern Solomons was control of an operational airfield on Guadalcanal (15:23).

Increased enemy air activity over Tulagi-Guadalcanal during the first week of August was but a feint, meant to divert Japanese efforts to support the Buna (New Guinea) reinforcement convoy scheduled for August 8 (8:7).

The Papuan land campaign was meaningless unless Guadalcanal could be held (15:23).

The Americans were not reading Japanese signal traffic and did not know Japanese war plans.

The American presence on Guadalcanal was merely an annoyance to be dealt with quickly (7:42).

Recapturing the airfield on Guadalcanal was the key to dislodging the Americans (15:28).

#### Land

The army assumed the information it received from the navy regarding the Coral Sea and Midway battles was accurate (4:44).

Bushido, "The Way of the Warrior," the code of the samurai, would prevail over American dependence upon abundant machine power and material power (4:88).

It was the ineluctable duty of the Japanese soldier, when faced with insurmountable odds, to die gloriously for the Emperor (4:87).

Americans kill all prisoners.

An American infantry attack will be preceded by an artillery barrage (13:365).

American infantry forces do not engage in night attacks (13:366).

American artillery and mortar fire is only on prepared points (13:367).

The American Army is slow, cautious, steady, and advances step by step (13:367).

The American force that landed on Guadalcanal was a 2000-man reconnaissance-in-force with the mission to destroy the airfield and withdraw (4:79).

After the Ichiki Force was annihilated in mid-August and the Kawaguchi Force was slaughtered in its mid-September failure to take the airfield, Guadalcanal would be lost for good unless stronger measures were taken to recapture it (15:28).

Terrain, weather, enemy capability, and the absence of reliable rapid communications would not affect 17th Army plans for simultaneous assaults on the American perimeter at three widely separated points (4:159).

The American defense perimeter was thinly held and a breakthrough to the vital areas ringing the airfield would yield the headquarters, fuel, food, ammunition and communications center of the enemy (4:158).

#### Sea

The navy assumed it was more important to "save face" regarding Midway than to be forthright with the army about the disaster (6:59).

The Imperial Japanese Navy could destroy the US Pacific Fleet in a decisive battle (1:134).

The main strength of the Combined Fleet would be required to deal with Allied aircraft on Guadalcanal and aboard carriers (15:27).

After the airfield on Guadalcanal was in operation by the Allied forces, Japanese forces there could only be reinforced/resupplied at night.

Japanese submarines could prevent the resupply/reinforcement of American forces on Guadalcanal (15:28).

A pair of Japanese airfields could be built in the central Solomons within range of American land-based air on Guadalcanal (15:32).

A streamlined "Tokyo Express" of fast destroyers could keep the Japanese garrison on Guadalcanal resupplied while the central Solomons airfields were being constructed (15:32).

The American Navy's habitual withdrawal to the south and east in each instance since the invasion of August 7 reflected a great concern for the security of their base at Ndeni, in the Santa Cruz Islands, and their line of communications Noumea-Fiji-Samoa such that they would leave the marine garrison on Guadalcanal unsupported in order to defend it (8:174-175).

### Air

The deployment of 60 planes to the airfield on Guadalcanal, which was to be ready by August 7, would lessen the danger of an Allied invasion there (6:49).

Daytime air raids on Guadalcanal in concert with night surface bombardment would permit troop reinforcement sufficient to retake the airfield while Combined Fleet carriers destroyed Allied carrier cover and land-based air (15:29).

American aircraft from Guadalcanal and US Pacific Fleet carriers commanded the waters around the southern Solomons by day (15:27).

These assumptions contributed to a number of Japanese planning failures which prevented the Army from recapturing Tulagi and Guadalcanal and the Navy from defeating the US Pacific Fleet in a "decisive battle." First, the Japanese failed to gather accurate intelligence on the size and capability of the American invasion force, the terrain on Guadalcanal and its trafficability, and the availability and loyalty of native guides. Secondly, the 17th Army failed to develop a simple plan to puncture the Marine's defense perimeter, capture the airfield, vital supplies, equipment and ammunition, and destroy the enemy headquarters. Thirdly, the Japanese failed to consider adequately the requirements for land-based air to counter American air power on Guadalcanal and US Pacific Fleet carriers,



to support Japanese Army forces on Guadalcanal, and to protect surface lines of communication. Fourthly, Japanese military planners failed to reckon the "cost"--in terms of men, materiel, and ships--of trying to keep Guadalcanal and dislodge the marines on it until the payment had already been extracted (1:182). Fifthly, the Combined Fleet failed to devise a simple battle plan in which all ships, superior in number, could be brought to bear against the US Pacific Fleet (1:198).

These planning failures, and numerous others were borne of overconfidence, arrogance, obstinacy, inflexibility, and the need to save "face" on the part of many Japanese military planners and commanders. By not knowing "the conditions of mountains and forests, hazardous defiles, marshes and swamps" on Guadalcanal a series of Japanese ground commanders made plans that would not work. Thus, did the Imperial Japanese Army commit its forces piecemeal at a rate slower than the Americans were able to get reinforcements. By failing to bring land-based air power within effective range of Guadalcanal the Japanese were unable to achieve air superiority over the ground battle area. By employing the very division of forces that led to his defeat at Midway Admiral Yamamoto was defeated piecemeal. By failing to calculate the "cost" of trying to hold Guadalcanal, the Japanese risked having to "pay any price" in a war of attrition they were certain to lose.

There were alternatives open to the Japanese that might have produced a different outcome. Had the Japanese Navy completed the development of new air bases in southern Bougainville before it took Tulagi, the Japanese could have provided land-based air cover for the southern Solomons and might have disrupted the American landings on Guadalcanal. After August 7, had the Southeast Area Force quickly accelerated completion of the southern Bougainville air bases before the Americans began operating from Henderson Field, the Marines' toehold might have been dislodged.

Had the 17th Army obtained accurate intelligence information about Guadalcanal through reconnaissance flights, they might have developed an appreciation for the terrain that would have enabled them to develop a simple and feasible plan to attack the American garrison.

Had the Combined Fleet brought together a major naval force, capable of transporting and protecting a large-scale army invasion force and destroying the US Pacific Fleet, the Japanese might have driven the Americans off Guadalcanal.

#### Allied Objectives

Admiral Ernest J. King had a dilemma. He was congenitally unsympathetic to a defensive posture in the Pacific yet he had to support the Allied grand strategy,

which specified such a posture in order to concentrate Allied effort against the European Axis, or lose his job (4:6).

The Japanese flood of military triumphs, and the concomitant Allied pattern of retreat with no particular inclination to fight, convinced King that immediate action must be taken to limit Japanese advance. Thus, he recommended to General George C. Marshall, Chief of Staff of the Army, that American garrisons quickly occupy Fiji, Tonga and the New Hebrides to establish a series of "strong points" in the Southern Pacific from which a step-by-step advance could be made via the Solomons upon the Japanese bastion at Rabaul (4:7).

#### Allied Strategies

Admiral King quickly and correctly concluded that his plan for an offensive strategy in the Pacific would not get far in the War Department, so he wrote to the President. His memo suggested a useful line for US endeavor against the Japanese and proposed an integrated plan of operations, which he summarized in nine words: Hold Hawaii; Support Australia; Drive Northwestward from the New Hebrides (4:7).

Admiral King's enthusiasm for a drive Northwestward from the New Hebrides into the Solomons was not shared by Secretary of War Stimson or General Marshall. They viewed

King's proposal as diversionary and dangerously divisive. However, Marshall realized that the New Hebrides must be held, if only to secure the line of communication from Hawaii to Australia. Thus, he ordered US Army forces from New Caledonia, assisted by a Marine Corps air and coastal defense battalion, to build a fighter strip on Efate and a bomber base on Espiritu Santo, where a naval construction battalion, the "Seabees," appeared for the first time in the Pacific.

Meanwhile, on April 17, 1942, King appointed Vice Admiral Robert L. Ghormley, a brilliant strategist and accomplished diplomat with little knowledge of the South Pacific, as Commander of the new South Pacific Force and Area. Ghormley's new domain included New Zealand, New Caledonia, New Hebrides, the lower Solomons, and the island groups of Fiji, Tonga, Samoa, Phoenix, and Society. It was carved out of Admiral Nimitz' Pacific Ocean Area and was adjacent to MacArthur's Southwest Pacific Area. King advised Ghormley that,

You will have . . . a most difficult task. I do not have the tools to give you to carry out that task as it should be . . . this fall (1942), we hope to start an offensive from the South Pacific . . . (4:9).

King saw the persistent, but slow, Japanese advance from Rabaul-Kavieng to the southeast as an imminent threat to the New Hebrides that must be checked abruptly (4:10).

The ultimate objective of the planned offensive operations was "seizure and occupation of the New Britain - New Zealand - New Guinea area"; their purpose, "to deny the area to Japan" (4:28).

King began looking for an accessible chink in the enemy's armor. He turned down, with MacArthur's concurrence, a plan from Nimitz that Lieutenant Colonel Merritt Edson's First Marine Raiders attack and gut Tulagi and withdraw. He vetoed a proposal from MacArthur right after Midway to seize Rabaul with one "amphibiously trained division" supported by carrier aircraft. What King had in mind was an operation limited in scope, but designed to stop the Japanese rather than merely to delay or irritate them. By mid-June he had satisfied himself that seizure of the "Tulagi area" and subsequent occupation of Ndeni in the Santa Cruz Islands could be accomplished with the means at hand (4:25).

Getting JCS agreement was not easy. Marshall correctly foresaw that operations up the Solomons chain would inevitably draw resources from the European theatre, to which joint strategy had given primacy. General H.H. Arnold, Commander of Army Air Forces, agreed with Marshall that action in the Pacific must be defensive until the build

up for invasion of Europe was well underway. Finally agreeing that something must be done to stop the Japanese, the JCS ratified King's proposal (4:25).

The thorny problem of Command was subsequently resolved when Marshall agreed that the first phase, or "task," would be run by the Navy. Nimitz was therefore given responsibility for Task I, which was given the Codename WATCHTOWER and defined as "seizure and occupation of Santa Cruz Islands, Tulagi, and adjacent positions" (4:28). MacArthur was named to execute Tasks II and III, the capture of the northern Solomons and seizure of Rabaul, as soon as possible after successful conclusion of Task I. A warning order for the first phase of the offensive was issued on June 25. Prospective D-day was set for August 1.

Vice Admiral Ghormley quickly concluded that WATCHTOWER was a dubious undertaking. The time factor did not allow for detailed planning and preparatory activities. Elementary information about terrain, sea conditions, and weather in the objective area was lacking. Those maps and charts available were old and unreliable. Tide tables showed erratic rise and fall with unpredictable irregularity. The only estimates of Japanese strength, arms and dispositions on Tulagi, Gavutu and Guadalcanal were those provided by coastwatchers operating deep in the jungle and were of questionable accuracy. Japanese capabilities to

respond to an invasion of the lower Solomons could not be assayed. Ghormley knew MacArthur did not have the air strength to neutralize Rabaul and Kavieng, much less interdict sea approaches to Guadalcanal from the northwest. The forces assigned were insufficient and not yet adequately trained. He saw small chance that the projected operation could be continuously supported (4:29).

Ghormley perforce conducted his logistics planning in a vacuum. To admirals in Washington, "Logistics" was an esoteric term peculiar to the Army. "I don't know what the hell this 'logistics' is that Marshall is always talking about," King is said to have remarked in the early spring of 1942, "but I want some of it." So did Ghormley, but he didn't get any. No one in the Navy Department "took proper cognizance of the time element in providing material for the construction work". . . underway in the South Pacific. As a result, the only airfield in the New Hebrides capable of supporting even limited operations was that at Vila, on Efate. Most of the aircraft assigned to Rear Admiral John S. McCain, commander of all Ghormley's shore-based air, were "short-legged." Without belly tanks, and there were none in the South Pacific, they could not reach the lower Solomons. Even that portion of his long-range B-17 bombers based at Efate must fly 710 miles to reach the Solomons target area. The lack of airfields, of trained replacement pilots and air

crews, shortage of planes and spare parts, and the primitive maintenance facilities available to the few mechanics, were conditions for which no combination of skill and will by McCain and his subordinates could compensate (4:30).

Ghormley's staff was as ignorant as he of the complexities of the amphibious assault. The admiral had no suitably equipped headquarters from which to exercise command. Communications facilities were limited, and watch bills were inadequately manned. New Zealand could not provide the food items Washington planners kept assuring him were available. Rear-area hospitals were not yet completed. Construction of forward area harbor, dock, unloading and warehousing facilities was still under discussion (4:31). Thus, Vice Admiral Ghormley had a lot on his mind as he approached his first meeting with General Douglas MacArthur to present these and other objections.

At their Melbourne meeting, MacArthur went at once to the heart of the matter, which he correctly considered to be sustained air superiority over the target area. Without adequate air cover and continuous air support, MacArthur stated, no such operation should be initiated. The Japanese were daily increasing air and naval strength at Rabaul and Kavieng. He confirmed Ghormley's belief that from existing bases and with the aircraft available to him, he could not neutralize these bases. The lack of shipping precluded the



continuous flow of supplies and equipment required to ensure the security of any lodgement on a hostile shore. Thus, MacArthur also deemed WATCHTOWER "open to the gravest doubts." In any event, he concluded, the strategic concept left much to be desired. He conceived the three phases of the offensive as a sweep from the lower Solomons to Rabaul to be accomplished in a "continuous movement," a roll-up which, once begun, would proceed northwest with snowballing momentum. After their discussion the two commanders released a dispatch to the JCS recommending postponement of WATCHTOWER. The Chiefs, in a few well-chosen words, immediately rejected the advice from Melbourne. They conceived it necessary to stop the Japanese and stop them at once: they "did not desire to countermand the operations underway and the execution of Task I" (4:31).

#### Allied Forces

Admiral Ghormley as COMSOPAC was the overall strategic commander charged with the general direction of the campaign. The officer in tactical command was Vice Admiral Frank Jack Fletcher, commander of Task Force 61, the Expeditionary Force. Fletcher limited his command to the three carrier groups that were to provide air cover for the landings. Rear Admiral Richmond Kelley Turner, commander of TF 62, the South Pacific Amphibious Force and the embarked Marines, was in the command echelon below Fletcher, but had

complete autonomy from the moment of sailing. The landing force, General A.A. Vandegrift's 16,000-man First Marine Division, was to remain subordinate to Turner long after it had been engaged in battle. Admiral Crutchley, RN, commanded the Australian and American cruiser and destroyer force which furnished gunfire support and antiaircraft protection to the amphibious operation. There were two mutually independent components of land-based air power: Rear Admiral McCain's (TF 63) planes (Army, Navy, and Marine Corps), operating from bases in New Caledonia, Fiji, Efate and (presently) Espiritu Santo; and General MacArthur's operating from Port Moresby and bases in Queensland Australia. Two groups of submarines were sent on the prowl: one from the Pacific Fleet to watch the Japanese advanced naval base at Truk; and six S-boats, based at Brisbane, to watch Rabaul (12:268-270). A summary of major naval forces at key dates during the campaign is shown below (1:205,206,235,249).

	<u>23 August</u>				<u>25 Oct</u>			<u>15 Nov</u>
	<u>TF11</u>	<u>TF16</u>	<u>TF18</u>	<u>TOT</u>	<u>TF16</u>	<u>TF17</u>	<u>TOT</u>	<u>TF67</u>
Heavy Carriers	1	1	1	3	1	1	2	
Battleships		1		1	1		1	2
Heavy Cruisers	2	1	2	5	1	2	3	3
Light Cruisers		1	1	2	1	2	3	3
Destroyers	5	6	7	18	8	6	14	15
Transports								4
TOTAL	8	10	11	29	12	11	23	27

Task Force 62 was structured into Task Groups for Transport, Landing Force, Fire Support, Air Support Screening, and Minesweeping. The Transport group was further divided into two Task units: Transport Group X-Ray with the Guadalcanal landing force embarked in fifteen transports; and Transport Group Yoke, carrying the assault troops for the Tulagi landing in eight transports. The Landing Force Task Group likewise organized into two landing forces: Group X-Ray under Vandegrift was to land on Guadalcanal with 11,300 men, while Group Yoke under his assistant division commander, Brigadier General William H. Rupertus, was to assault Tulagi with about 3,900 men (5:24).

To the Tulagi group Vandegrift assigned the 1st Marine Raider Battalion, the 1st Parachute Battalion, and the 2d Battalion, 5th Marines. The Guadalcanal invasion would be made by the other two "combat groups" within the 1st Marine Division, plus the balance of the division special and service troops. A "combat group" consisted of an infantry regiment with its direct-support artillery battalion, engineers, signal, medical, and other combined supporting elements (5:20).

Numerous units and organizations reinforced the First Marine Division after the 7 August landings. Key ground units included the Seventh and Eighth Marine Regiments, the Second Marine Raider Battalion and the Second Tank Battalion. In addition, the division was reinforced by amphibious tractors, antiaircraft, engineer, service and medical units, as well as a barrage balloon squadron. Aviation units that formed the First Marine Aircraft Wing included six fighter squadrons, six scout bombing squadrons, two utility squadrons, a photographic and an observation squadron. Three air group headquarters squadrons and three service squadrons, in addition to the Wing Headquarters squadron, were also deployed (4:268).

Navy units that participated in the campaign were CUB One and Motor Torpedo Boat Squadrons Two and Three. Navy aviation units that participated included seven scouting squadrons, three bombing squadrons, three fighting squadrons, two torpedo squadrons and a field torpedo unit (4:268).

The major US Army ground force was the Americal Division, which became the nucleus of the XIV Corps that later included the, Americal, the 25th Infantry and the 47th Infantry Divisions. Army aviation units operating from and

over Guadalcanal were two heavy bombardment groups, a medium bombardment squadron, a troop carrier squadron, three fighter squadrons and a fighter group headquarters (4:269).

#### Allied Planning

Admiral King's rationale for conducting WATCHTOWER without delay came from his conviction that an airfield in Japanese possession on Guadalcanal "will hamper seriously if not prevent our establishment in Santa Cruz," and would put the Japanese "in a position to harass Espiritu Santo." Even if additional demands for the plan to invade Europe should postpone Tasks II and III, the Tulagi operation must go on. Although the Tulagi-Guadalcanal operation was indeed a perilous undertaking the risk had to be taken. This new Japanese spearhead had to be cut off then and there, lest it sever the lifeline between the United States and Australia (12:262).

On 2 July 1942 the Joint Chiefs of Staff decided to use the First Marine Division, already on its way to Noumea, to recover Guadalcanal and Tulagi. The forces to undertake the operation were put together swiftly, and, as might be expected in such a quickly organized effort, they lacked proper balance, sufficient operational and logistic planning, and an adequate fleet of warships to escort the invading Marines (1:183).

Having been warned by Admiral Ghormley on 29 June that D-day was slated for 1 August, General Vandegrift had two pressing problems. The first was to acquire without delay that information on terrain and enemy which would enable him to formulate a basic scheme of maneuver ashore. On this depended the entire pattern of the landing. For until such a scheme had been prepared it was impossible to develop detailed plans for the ship-to-shore movement, for naval gunfire and air support, for supply organization of beaches, and for the complex communications network necessary to control and support an opposed landing. To collect the information on which to build his plan, Vandegrift immediately dispatched his intelligence officer, Lieutenant Colonel Frank B. Goettge, to Australia. Goettge interviewed evacuated planters, traders, schooner captains, ex-missionaries, and the like who knew of the islands. MacArthur's command and the Australian Navy helped but the amount of information obtained was disappointing in quantity and quality (12:266).

At the same time he recommended to Admiral Ghormley that a select group of officers, plus experienced communications personnel with their equipment, fly at once to Townsville, Australia, board a submarine there, and proceed to Guadalcanal to contact Coastwatcher Martin Clemens. The mission of this patrol would be to investigate

tide and beach conditions, to observe Japanese activities on Guadalcanal, and to report enemy strength and disposition. In view of the paucity of useful military planning information, this request was both logical and reasonable. The recommendation was rejected by Admiral Ghormley as "too dangerous." (4:27)

Vandegrift's other problem was equally acute. The second echelon of his Division was still at sea and would not reach Wellington until July 11, three weeks before scheduled D-day. The vessels carrying the First Marine Regiment, division artillery, tanks, amphibious tractors, and most of the engineer equipment had been commercially loaded and this would have to be emptied and their cargo sorted on Aotea Quay before combat-loading could commence. The Division staff had little idea of what material was actually in each ship carrying the second echelon because the Navy had refused Vandegrift's request for his representatives to supervise outloading at ports of embarkation (4:28).

Vandegrift had other concerns as well. Lack of time, restricted port facilities, improper packaging, and uncooperative weather combined to create what he described in language notable for its moderation, as "an unparalleled logistical problem." As there were not enough ships available, individual and organizational equipment was cut

to the bone. All sea bags, bed rolls, tentage, suitcases, and trunks were stored in Wellington. Personal care items were limited to minimum quantities of soaps, tobacco, matches and razor blades. All bulk supplies--rations, fuel, lubricants--were reduced to 60 days; ammunition sliced from 15 to 10 days of fire for all weapons (4:32).

But Vandegrift's apprehension about such difficulties would seem attractive when compared with the apoplexy he got from Vice Admiral Frank Jack Fletcher. The Expeditionary Force commander had no previous experience in the type of operation he had been designated to execute. Ghormley had not issued a "Letter of Instruction" to Fletcher, nor had Fletcher submitted even a summary of his plan to Ghormley for scrutiny. The result was that the implementing commander arrived at the pre-invasion conference off Koro in the Fiji's with a complete misconception of the nature of WATCHTOWER and of his responsibilities in connection with it (4:34). Vandegrift was surprised to learn that Fletcher had neither knowledge of nor interest in the Guadalcanal operation and was thunderstruck to hear him saying frankly that it would not succeed (6:55). But he was aghast when, after Turner advised Fletcher it would take about five days to land troops, Fletcher stated that he would leave the vicinity of the Solomons after two days because of danger of air attacks



against the carriers and the fuel situation; and that if the troops could not be landed in two days, then they should not be landed. In any case, he would depart at that time . . . (4:35). Turner's and Vandegrift's remonstrations left Fletcher unmoved. Ghormley, who could have dispelled the misunderstandings, was not at the conference. His Chief of Staff, Rear Admiral Daniel J. Callaghan, took notes in silence.

Shortly after receiving Nimitz' operation order for WATCHTOWER, Ghormley observed that he had been given enough ships and men to do the job, provided MacArthur could interdict interference by enemy planes based at Rabaul. He said, "the basic problem of the operation is the protection of ships against land-based aircraft attack during the approach, the landing, and the unloading." General MacArthur aptly remarked that his air force would need heavy and quick reinforcement to accomplish that (12:264).

MacArthur's air plan, which he sent to Ghormley on 20 July, provided for air reconnaissance over Port Moresby, the Bismarcks, and the whole line of the Solomons to Guadalcanal up to 2 August; and thereafter, daily searches up to the dividing line, with a view to interdicting Japanese flights southward from Rabaul as well as reporting enemy ships. This plan had to be considerably modified on 21 July after the Japanese landed troops at Buna and Gona on

the north coast of Papua, commenced movement over the Owen Stanly Range to take Port Moresby from the rear, and on the 30th shot down five of seven Army bombers from Port Moresby that had attacked the new Japanese positions. MacArthur now had a defensive campaign on his hands that absorbed much of his capability to support WATCHTOWER (12:269). McCain's land-based aircraft were to reconnoiter the northern approaches to Guadalcanal several days before the landings. Fletcher's carrier-based scout bombers were to make short-range substitute searches in sectors where bad weather precluded a flight by land-based fliers--McCain to advise Fletcher when and where (12:23). Turner was uneasy about the air-search plan for the Slot, the obvious enemy route from Rabaul to the lower Solomons, because it went only as far north as Choiseul and reached its outer limit very early in the morning, leaving undetected any hostile force entering the Slot later in the day. He asked McCain to send a Catalina up the Slot, even though it would cover part of MacArthur's area.

### Assumptions

The Americans made a number of assumptions about their military planning for the Guadalcanal operation. They include:

#### General

Japanese bases on New Guinea and the southern Solomons threatened lines of communication between the US and Australia (7:3).

A dual advance on Rabaul could be launched from positions on the north Papuan coast and the southern Solomons (15:23).

The airfield on Guadalcanal was the key to Allied movement toward Rabaul (15:23).

Admiral Nimitz and Vice Admiral Ghormley assumed Vice Admiral Fletcher understood and would support the WATCHTOWER operation.

Vice Admiral Ghormley, Com So Pac, would command the WATCHTOWER operation in person (17:187).

Vice Admiral Fletcher assumed that his lack of knowledge about the plans for WATCHTOWER, his lack of faith in the success of the operation, and his opposition to it did not materially affect him in the execution of his responsibilities as its implementing commander.

It was more important to execute a hasty plan to invade Guadalcanal before Japanese land-based air arrived than it was to execute a thorough plan afterward.

#### Sea

The beaches selected for the invasion landings would be useable (7:14).

Sufficient cargo-handling equipment, stevedore personnel, cranes, tugs, etc., to support the operation would be in position and operating in Auckland, Noumea, and Guadalcanal ahead of the combat troops (12:255).

The unsatisfactory rehearsal landings at Fiji would not affect the invasion landings on Guadalcanal (7:14).

Rear Admiral Turner would keep transports in the Guadalcanal area as long as necessary to unload them (7:14).

Allied radar would provide adequate warning of Japanese aircraft and ships (7:34).

American carriers were too valuable to be lost during an amphibious landing operation.

The American carrier force could defeat the Japanese Combined Fleet in the waters northeast of Guadalcanal (15:29).

PT boats could mount effective night attacks on Japanese ships (15:23).

#### Land

The Japanese were the greatest jungle fighters in the world (7:5).

The First Marine Division would have until early 1943 to train for combat operations (7:9).

The Marines would be used strictly as offensive troops; once they had seized Guadalcanal, they would turn it over to a garrison of soldiers and move on to assault another island (7:8).

Twenty four days was adequate time to plan, embark, rehearse, move, and assault America's first full-scale invasion of World War II (7:9-10).

Aerial photo-maps of Guadalcanal were not essential to First Marine Division staff planning for the invasion (7:13).

American carrier cover would be in the objective area for more than three days (7:14).

The resupply/reinforcement essential to the successful outcome of the campaign in the southern Solomons would be provided by the US Navy.

Coastwatchers in the northern Solomons would provide warning of Japanese aircraft and ships moving from Rabaul and Kavieng toward Guadalcanal (7:23).

#### Air

B-17s from Espiritu Santo could bomb ships effectively (15:31).

Operation WATCHTOWER had been planned so hurriedly that, at the time of the Koro conference and rehearsal, there remained many details to be worked out. "Everyone deplored lack of time to plan carefully and thoroughly but saw no way out except to whip plans in shape as rapidly as possible," reported Admiral Callaghan (12:281). Perhaps Nimitz saw most clearly the potential setbacks that could result from the cumulative effect of these many overlooked details. He pointed out that once we occupied Guadalcanal our forces on land and air would be in close contact with the enemy, who would be in a position to move up amphibious forces under cover of land-based aircraft to recover his lost positions. It must be assumed that the Japanese would exert every effort to do that, and the process was bound to be costly for both sides. Unless provision were made for steady flow of replacements from the United States, "not only will we be unable to proceed with Tasks II and III, but we may be unable to hold what we have taken" (12:265).

Two alternatives, using the 1st Marine Raider Battalion to take Tulagi and deferring WATCHTOWER until adequate means were available for a quick seizure and rapid follow-up, had already been considered and rejected. The time had come for the Allies to take the initiative away from the Japanese or let them have the South Pacific.

### Campaign Results

Guadalcanal lasted for almost exactly six months. During this time, six naval battles were fought and sixty-five combat ships sunk. Japanese aircraft losses were staggering; though the figures have never been precisely computed, between August 7, 1942 and February 7, 1943, the naval air arm lost upwards of 800 planes and 2,362 pilots and crewmen. The Japanese Army, which left nearly 21,000 corpses behind when it was evacuated, was not, in the words of Major General Kawaguchi, the only service "buried in the graveyard of Guadalcanal." Of the dead, 8,500 had been killed in action. Over 12,300 had died of wounds, disease, or starvation (4:244). American casualties were about 1,600 dead and 4,250 wounded (13:350).

At the end of 8 August all of the marines were ashore and they owned the airfield on Guadalcanal. Japanese airmen had not hit the stocks of supplies that were beginning to build up on the shore, and Vandegrift believed he could count on a few more days of unloading. But he could not. (7:32). Turner was forced to withdraw his amphibious ships because Fletcher left after 36 hours. Shortly after Fletcher initiated his request to retire he learned that a Japanese surface force was advancing down the Slot toward the lower Solomons but he continued toward the Southeast (4:57). That night the Japanese force of five

heavy and two light cruisers, and a destroyer, under Vice Admiral Mikawa, surprised and smashed the US Navy in the First Battle of the Solomon Sea. After sinking four cruisers, a destroyer, and a transport and damaging another destroyer, Mikawa's force retired up the Slot with only superficial damage instead of carrying out its plan to destroy the transports still offloading at Lunga Point. He did not view the threat to Guadalcanal as a serious one and he was aware of the threat posed by Fletcher's aircraft if they attacked his naked column. He did not know that Fletcher was already long gone (4:65).

With the Navy gone from Guadalcanal, the Marines presumed the loss of air support as well as sea supply/reinforcement (7:36). On 9 August they commenced actions to hold a beachhead perimeter with 10,000 infantrymen with handguns, mortars, some tanks, and three battalions of light artillery against an enemy who possessed interior lines of communication and all the men, guns, ships, and planes required and who now had the initiative. Trained to hit, the Marines were now being forced to hold. The battle for Guadalcanal passed from an offensive to a defensive operation for the Allies (7:37).

On 12 August the 25-man "Goettge Patrol" went out to investigate whether the Japanese remaining on Guadalcanal might be willing to surrender. They were ambushed and cut

down by machine gunfire at Matanikau Village. As one of the three survivors fled he turned around for a last look and saw "sabers flashing in the sun," an image that put the Marines in a murderous mood. Thereafter, they would neither ask nor give any quarter.

On 18 August a 900-man advance echelon of the Ichiki Detachment landed at Taivu, to the east of the Marine perimeter (6:114). A 250-man element of the 5th Sasebo Special Naval Landing Force landed at Kokumbona in a distracting move to the west of the perimeter. They were slaughtered next day by Fifth Marines near Matanikau (6:112). Colonel Ichiki's orders were to "cooperate with the Navy and quickly recapture and maintain the airfields at Guadalcanal." If that was not possible, he was to await the arrival of troops from the rear (4:80). However, Colonel Ichiki, commander of one of the elite storm detachments in the Japanese Army, had already decided to attack. On 21 August the Ichiki Detachment was annihilated by First Marines and artillery in night action along the Ilu River (4:84). Almost 800 Japanese had been killed. After the defeat, Colonel Ichiki hurried back to Taivu, burned his regiment's color and committed hara-kiri (4:87). Lieutenant General Hyakutake notified IGHQ that "the attack of the Ichiki Detachment was not entirely successful" (6:131).



The Japanese Army's situation on Guadalcanal was critical and reinforcements were desperately needed. Admiral Yamamoto had two purposes: (1) Destroy the US Pacific Fleet in the area using carrier planes, and (2) keep the Americans from attacking the troop convoy by using heavy cruisers for intensive night bombardment of Henderson Field while the transports offloaded. By placing the light carrier Ryujo 100 miles west of his heavy carriers, Yamamoto again used the same division of forces that contributed to his defeat at Midway (1:197-198). The American advantage in carrier-based planes was reduced when Fletcher sent Wasp, with 83 planes, south on 23 August to refuel. Thus, the Japanese had 177 planes, the US Navy 176 (1:197). It was a battle of aircraft against ships. The Japanese lost the carrier Ryujo, one destroyer and one light cruiser sunk, ninety planes shot down, and a cruiser and a seaplane carrier damaged. The Enterprise suffered damage and twenty American planes were lost. The action delayed the landing of Japanese troops a few days and gave the 1st Marine Division more time to strengthen its defenses (13:100). In the weeks that followed, the Naval Force of the South Pacific lost several more ships, but did not inflict serious damage upon the enemy. Nine cruisers and destroyers

returned to the Southwest Pacific, the Wasp was sunk and the Saratoga and North Carolina were damaged by torpedoes. Carrier strength was reduced to one, the Hornet (13:101).

Admiral Tsukahara, Commander of the Southeast Area Force, decided soon after the Battle of the Eastern Solomons that Japanese strength was to be built up steadily on Guadalcanal by stealthy night landings from destroyers. The first "Rat" operation was slated for 27 August. This decision revealed to Rear Admiral Tanaka, Commander of the Guadalcanal Reinforcement Force, the lack of unity and apparent rivalry between Tsukahara and Mikawa on Rabaul. The Area Commander and the Eighth Fleet Commander operated from separate headquarters and each devised his own projects (4:93). This arrangement produced a series of impetuous countermanding orders and considerable confusion for Tanaka at the Shortlands (7:140).

Between 29 August and 11 September, the 6200-man Kawaguchi Force landed at night from destroyers and transports at Taivu to the east and Kokumbona to the west of the Marine perimeter. This outfit was made up of the Ichiki Force rear echelon, the 124th Infantry, the 2d Battalion, 4th Infantry, antitank, artillery, engineer, and signal elements (6:112). Major General Kawaguchi lost 400 of his men when the barges on which he insisted 1000 of them travel from the Shortlands to Guadalcanal were strafed by planes

from Henderson Field. Kawaguchi had prevailed over the strenuous opposition of Rear Admiral Tanaka, who knew the risks of being caught in the open. Tanaka was relieved of his command on 31 August. On the same day IGHQ issued a directive making Port Moresby secondary to the Guadalcanal Campaign (6:143).

Although the Japanese were surprised that the air battle was decisively in favor of the Marines, Admiral McCain reported to Nimitz on 31 August that additional aircraft and crews must be provided immediately. He pointed out that "Guadalcanal can be a sink hole for enemy airpower that can be consolidated and exploited. The reverse is true if we lose Guadalcanal." He then laid it on the line: "If the reinforcement requested is not made available, Guadalcanal cannot be supplied and hence cannot be held" (4:99-100).

Major General Kawaguchi landed at Taivu on 31 August. He had been directed by Hyukatake to "view the enemy strength, position, and terrain" to see whether it was "possible or not to achieve quick success in the attack against the airfield with [your] present strength." But Kawaguchi had little inclination to "view" the enemy strength, position, and terrain. Before leaving the Shortlands, he had drawn up a plan to capture the airfield on September 13 by a three-pronged attack: three battalions

would come from the south, one from the east, and two from the southwest. The main effort would be supported by naval gunfire and airstrikes. This textbook elaboration was made in the absence of information about the terrain, without reconnaissance, but with the firm conviction that the soft American defenders, few in number, would yield to the overwhelming "spiritual" authority of Japanese swords and bayonets (4:101-102).

The general deployed his forces in accordance with his plan and when it was reported that Kawaguchi was encountering unforeseen delays in the jungle, Hyukatake in Rabaul directed that the attack be launched on the night of the 12th. The Eighth Fleet and the Eleventh Air Fleet adjusted their support schedules. Kawaguchi attacked on schedule with two reinforced battalions. The Marines were ready with automatic rifles, machine guns, mortars and carefully planned artillery. Two days later Kawaguchi left behind him a bloodstained ridge littered with over 1200 Japanese corpses and limped back into the jungle (4:120).

Both the Japanese and the Allies needed reinforcements. Headquarters 17th Army began moving units to the Shortlands while Admiral Ghormley temporized over Turner's urgent request for the Seventh Marines. He approved reinforcement in principle but would not authorize it until the situation became "known" (4:127).

On 18 September the Seventh Marines (Reinforced) landed to reinforce the First Marine Division with vehicles, equipment, ammunition and rations (13:122).

An initial Marine offensive was repulsed 24-27 September at First Matanikau because of poor coordination of effort, garbled communications and haphazardly dispersed troop formations (4:137). A second American offensive at Matanikau 7-9 October was converted into a large-scale raid, supported by artillery. First Battalion, Seventh Marines annihilated the Japanese 4th Infantry Regiment, which lost nearly 700 men in three days (13:134).

On 9 October Lieutenant General Hyukatake and the 17th Army Headquarters arrived and within a week 22,000 men of the 2nd (Sendai) Division) with adequate arms and supplies had been landed on Guadalcanal. Sensing a large buildup that is expected before a major assault, the US Navy knew the Japanese would contest the convoy bringing in the 164th Infantry Regiment of the Americal Division (1:215). The Battle of Cape Esperance 11-12 October was a prelude which made another major battle inevitable--for success in the land battle depended upon naval bombardments, naval battles and air supremacy, while escalation merely prolonged and intensified the struggle (1:220).

Once the main strength of the Seventeenth Army had been delivered into Guadalcanal during the Battle of Cape Esperance, the Japanese were determined to end the Guadalcanal and southern Solomons Campaign. The overall plan called for a massive coordinated land attack to take Henderson Field. New airstrips were being constructed at Buin, at the southern tip of Bougainville, to provide better fighter protection for Japanese bombers. The Eleventh Air Fleet at Rabaul would make Henderson Field inoperable by day so that convoys could bring in troops, heavy artillery and supplies for the upcoming land battle; the Navy would intensify its night bombardments (1:223). Once the airfield was retaken, Admiral Yamamoto's Combined Fleet would then be able to "apprehend and annihilate" US Navy forces in the Solomon Seas region. The decisive factor was Henderson Field--as long as the field functioned, Japanese forces within a 250-mile radius were subject to daylight air attack, which made a sustained naval bombardment of Guadalcanal impossible (1:215).

Hyukatake had no intention of allowing the 2nd Division commander, Lieutenant General Maruyama, to repeat the costly defeats incurred by headstrong subordinates at the Ilu and the Ridge. He planned to assume personal command. Hyukatake would not attack until he had sufficient force. He therefore ordered the 38th Division toward the

Shortlands at once (4:139). Maruyama's object was to establish a forward battle position on the east bank of the Matanikau to secure a protected crossing for the tanks and to cover and protect positions for his new 6 inch howitzers, which he could then use to pulverize the airfield prior to the attack he had announced would deliver Henderson into his hands at one stroke (4:143).

The Japanese Army's general offensive opened on 22 October as a double-envelopment movement on Henderson Field (1:225). Hyukatake's scheme of attack provided for simultaneous assaults at three widely separated points. The main attack force, led by Lieutenant General Maruyama, would move through the jungle and strike from the south. A composite infantry-tank-artillery group, under Major General Sumiyoshi, would conduct a distracting operation to the west along the coast by crossing the Matanikau River on a sandbar at its mouth. A third force, under Colonel Oka, was to strike from the southwest to isolate the American Matanikau battle position and liquidate its defenders. The plan looked perfect. But it had been drawn without objective evaluation of terrain, weather, the enemy, and without apparent consideration for coordination in time and space. Rapid communications were a prerequisite for coordinating such disparate and difficult movements.

Maruyama's main force of 7000 had begun movement by a concealed route from Kokumbona to assembly areas south of Henderson Field on 16 October. The average soldier carried a load of some sixty pounds. In addition to his weapon, ammunition, several hand grenades, individual equipment, and 12 day's rations, each carried strapped to his pack one or more artillery or mortar shells (4:160). Four days later the column was bogged down in the jungle. Men's loads were heavy, the terrain rough, and humid heat vicious, the chilling night rains violent. Mountain and antitank guns and heavy mortars were now far behind; the crews manhandling these awkward loads over slippery ridges and through the muck of countless valleys were exhausted. One by one, artillery pieces were abandoned along the rutted trail, its verges strewn with artillery shells, antitank mines, and other heavy impedimenta (4:164).

On October 21, Maruyama postponed the attack for 48 hours. Just after noon on the 23d, seeing that his right wing--under Major General Kawaguchi, of Bloody Ridge--was not yet in position and could not possibly commence the attack as scheduled for sunset, Maruyama had no choice but to postpone the attack until 5:00 PM the following day. After doing so, he relieved Kawaguchi of his command. Unfortunately, radio communication between Maruyama and Sumiyoshi broke down. Maruyama got through to Hyakutake,



however, who informed Admiral Yamamoto, who withdrew the Combined Fleet to the north to refuel (4:166). Sumiyoshi didn't get the word and kicked off his attack at 6:00 PM on the 23d. The Marines were waiting. In short order they destroyed 11 Japanese tanks and with artillery slaughtered over 600 Japanese infantry as they waited in assembly areas. Sumiyoshi's distraction caused Vandegrift to pull a battalion out of the southern sector defenses and dispatch it to the Matanikau with orders to extend the left flank of the battle position to the southeast. Next day, this battalion began digging in on a ridge which formed a strong natural defensive position (4:167).

At noon on the 24th Maruyama issued his final orders for the attack, which "will begin at 17:00 and penetrate the enemy lines." At 1500 it began to rain. The jungle floor turned into a swamp. Communication between units went out. The attack did not jump off at 1700 and confusion reigned. When the rain stopped officers pulled their scattered units together. The impatient Maruyama ordered his left wing to attack as soon as possible. They did and were slaughtered. Repeated Japanese thrusts were checked by automatic weapons, machine guns, artillery and mortar fire throughout the night. Vandegrift estimated the total enemy dead as "at least 2000," and reported his own casualties as 86 killed, 119 wounded (4:169).

The next day was "Dugout Sunday," punctuated by dogfights overhead, surface raids in Sea Lark Channel, and an aborted Japanese attempt to land troops at Koli Point. Maruyama spent the day reorganizing his two wings for a "final death-defying night attack." The assault commenced after dark and resulted only in further slaughter. Half of the officers of the Sendai Division were killed in this holocaust. Maruyama led the remainder of his shattered force back over the route he had come.

Meanwhile, Colonel Oka encountered terrible terrain in moving to his attack position in the southwest. He had neglected to make a reconnaissance and his men had to break trail every foot of the way. In two days he covered less than two miles. He launched his delayed attack in the early morning of October 26 and was thrown back with heavy losses (4:173). The battalion that Vandegrift moved from the southern sector had dug in at exactly the right place.

With the Army's failure to recapture Guadalcanal and "annihilate the enemy," Yamamoto could wait no longer to execute the naval part of IGHQ orders. He sent his powerful Combined Fleet south again, to destroy the US Naval forces supporting Guadalcanal. The disposition of Yamamoto's ships shows that he still believed in a division of his forces, but this time he placed his Carrier Strike Force in the rear with battle fleets in the Van, hoping the US carrier planes

would go for the battle fleets instead of the carriers. On 25 October Yamamoto knew that he had been spotted and that an American task force lay east and north of the Santa Cruz Islands, but he did not know how many carriers were in it (1:228). He soon found out. When the battle was over, the Japanese had suffered extensive losses: one light carrier moderately damaged, one heavy carrier severely damaged and another slightly damaged, two destroyers damaged, and one heavy cruiser badly damaged. Early on October 27 Yamamoto was studying the results of his recent combat. Santa Cruz had cost him 100 front-line pilots. During the past two weeks 203 fliers had been lost attacking Henderson. A communique from Seventeenth Army Headquarters reported "our forces are regrouping behind the Matanikau River line." He wearily released a message that would soon reach Premier Tojo's desk. The advice was clear: we must abandon the effort to recapture Guadalcanal. From that moment, the Japanese had lost the initiative. They would never regain it (8:221).

The situation on Guadalcanal was becoming unendurable for both sides. Halsey, who had relieved Ghormley on the 18th, was determined to reinforce the land force to break the stalemate and prevent the Japanese from doing the same thing. Frequent large-scale Japanese air raids and losses from the ensuing air battles generated a

constant requirement for replacements. He kept Enterprise on station south of Guadalcanal to refuel aircraft moving north from the New Hebrides.

The Japanese Navy was just as determined as the Americans to isolate Guadalcanal while Tanaka and the "Tokyo Express" delivered the 38th Division. With both sides having such similar objectives, it was inevitable that a new and bigger naval battle would occur (1:237).

For two weeks after the Battle of the Santa Cruz Islands, the same time situation persisted. American ships would bring in troops by day, sometimes bombarding the Japanese land positions; then the Japanese ships would deliver troops by night and bombard Henderson. Between 2 and 10 November, sixty-five Japanese destroyers and two cruisers, all loaded with troops, brought in elements of the Japanese Army's 38th Division (1:238).

The initiative for the upcoming battle was taken by the Japanese. It would be another massive and prolonged effort; Yamamoto planned to bring men and supplies to Tassafaronga Point on the night of 14-15 November, using eleven well-escorted, high-speed transports, backed by an Attack Group. This movement would be preceded by two heavy bombardments of Henderson by battleships and heavy cruisers on 12-13 and 13-14 November. Halsey knew these units were gathering, and he used every available ship to meet them.

At the same time, he had to provide adequate protection for the Enterprise and get as many troops on to Guadalcanal as he could manage (1:238). The battle unfolded in three phases. The first phase commenced on 13 November and quickly became a wild melee; the most confused, close-ranged, and horrendous surface engagements of the war (1:239); between the Japanese Bombardment Force under Admiral Abe with two battleships, cruisers, and destroyers, and the US Support Group, which was split into two groups under Admirals Scott and Callaghan.

It began at 0150 when Admiral Abe's flagship, the battleship Hiei, illuminated Atlanta with her searchlight and opened fire at 4500 yards, point-blank range for a battleship, with all eight of her 14-inch guns. The first salvo ripped the Atlanta's superstructure to shreds, killing Admiral Scott and almost everyone else on the bridge. The Hiei at once drew fire from four American destroyers at ranges from 300 to 2000 yards, which riddled her topside and set fires across her deck. Admiral Abe, blinded by his own fires and confused about the whereabouts of his other units, gave little direction during the rest of the battle.

At 0155, the battleship Kirishima fired her 14-inch batteries into San Francisco's starboard beam at close range, levelling the Flagship's bridge, killing nearly all hands, including Admiral Callaghan.

After that, matters got out of hand; with Abe silent while Hiei fought for her life, and both American admirals dead, the battle developed into a Pier-6 brawl (1:240). When the shooting stopped at 0200, both sides were heavily damaged and suffered extensive losses. Abe's intended bombardment of Guadalcanal had been thwarted (1:242).

Yamamoto remained determined to bring the 38th Division to Guadalcanal despite the loss of Hiei and Abe's failure to bombard Henderson. He ordered Admiral Kondo's Strike Force, then 500 miles east of Rabaul to be available for bombardment on 14-15 November. Admiral Mikawa's Outer South Seas Force, which would also participate, started from the Shortlands.

Guadalcanal was wide open for a night bombardment. Admiral Kinkaid, who could have reinforced Henderson, kept the Enterprise and Task Force 16 south of Guadalcanal. He still refused, even in this crisis, to move the carrier farther north. Task Force 64, under Admiral Lee, was too far away to block Mikawa's force (1:242). Thus, from 0030 to 0128 Mikawa's heavy cruisers poured nearly 1400 rounds of 8-inch APHE shells onto the airfield.

Although the shelling of Henderson had not been effective, Guadalcanal still had to be reinforced, and the eleven troop transports were scheduled to arrive the night

of 14-15 November. Yamamoto decided to protect the vital convoy with one more onslaught on Henderson Field, this time using Admiral Kondo's Strike Force, reinforced by Abe's surviving ships.

The US Navy was equally determined to stop both the troop convoy and any further bombardment. Air reconnaissance gave Halsey an accurate picture of the size, location, and objectives of the Japanese forces. Keeping Enterprise to the south, he sent Task Force 64, with the new battleships Washington and South Dakota, with 16-inch guns, to stop both the bombardment and the reinforcement. By 2100 they were nine miles west of Guadalcanal, waiting for Kondo and Tanaka (1:243).

The third phase began at 2210 on 14 November when Sendai spotted Lee's Task Force 64. There ensued a series of maneuvers and exchanges between cruisers and destroyers until one of Kondo's destroyers illuminated South Dakota which was immediately hit by Kirishima's 14-inch guns and fire from nearby ships. Focused on South Dakota, the Japanese overlooked Washington, which overwhelmed Kirishima with deadly fire from her 16-inch guns. Soon after, Kondo cancelled the bombardment and at 0030 set course to the northeast. Needing all the protection he could get for his

transports, Tanaka sent destroyers ahead to attack any enemy ships near Tassafaronga. But what was left of Task Force 64 was retiring to the south.

Every air group in the area knew Tanaka's transports were coming and, between 1250 and 1750 on the 14th, seven of eleven destroyer/transports were sunk or heavily damaged by B-17s and dive bombers (1:246). At 0215, the remaining four reached Tassafaronga, where they were attacked with artillery from Lunga Point and from the air. All four were hit, set afire, and beached for offload. They departed at daybreak with only light damage and the attacks continued on the men and supplies that Tanaka had landed on the beach. The failure of the convoy caused deep depression in the Japanese Army headquarters at Rabaul, for it was felt that these transports carried the aspirations of the 17th Army. The cost to the Japanese had been prohibitive: Two battleships, one heavy cruiser, three destroyers, and eleven transports plus several damaged warships, the many planes that had been downed trying to provide aerial support, the better part of a 3000-man Naval Landing Force, and almost 5000 of the 7000 men of the 38th Division (1:247).

In Noumea, as a picture began to emerge from the battle reports and dispatches, Halsey read them and turned grinning to members of his staff: "We've got the bastards licked!" (4:206).



Imperial GHQ did not budge in its objective of controlling Guadalcanal, but the major elements of the Combined Fleet could neither sink the "land carrier" Henderson Field, nor destroy Halsey's naval power. The last major sea battle for Guadalcanal had been lost, and the Japanese Army was on its own. Although, no more big convoys were assembled, trickles of men and supplies were sent down the Slot almost every night (1:247). It was during one of these nightly deliveries on 30 November that the "Tokyo Express" defeated Task Force 67 in the Battle of Lunga Point by engaging a superior force, sinking one heavy cruiser and mauling three more while losing only one destroyer. Tanaka's six destroyer/ transports had again delivered their cargo and landed troops (1:257).

By 9 December the Americans had 40,000 troops on Guadalcanal while the Japanese had 25,000. Halsey, receiving intelligence that there was a build-up of Japanese shipping at the Shortlands and Buin, assumed the Japanese would make another major effort. Actually, no Japanese effort was being planned (1:254). On 12 December the Japanese Navy proposed evacuation but Army leaders, with 50,000 fresh troops in Rabaul to prepare for a reinforcement effort for 1 February, opposed the idea. On 31 December IGHQ agreed to the evacuation after deciding to rely on a new line of defense in New Georgia (1:253). Tanaka kept the

beleaguered 17th Army supplied throughout December and January by using a variety of new tactics and techniques, such as putting foodstuffs and supplies in drums and floating them ashore, operating only under low moon conditions, and using submarines and aircraft for deliveries.

On December 9, Vandegrift passed command of the Guadalcanal area to Major General Alexander M. Patch and Marines of the First Division embarked for Australia. The Army soon began a series of operations to clear the Japanese out of heavily fortified positions on Mount Austen as a prelude to a full-scale offensive against the Japanese west of the Matanikau. The regimental infantry advance was to be supported by artillery. It was during this offensive that "Time on Target" concentrations, designed to achieve maximum surprise and destruction by having all initial rounds hit the target simultaneously, were first fired in combat (13:238). This offensive evolved into a seige ring, which was slowly tightened around the Japanese stronghold, or the Gifu. Meanwhile, operations to the West of the Matanikau commenced with the arrival of the 25th Infantry Division and on 12-13 January, "The Galloping Horse" was taken in slow fighting against heavily fortified defensive positions. By mid-January the American lines extended inland (south) 4500 yards from Point Cruz and all resistance to the east of that

line except for the Japanese stronghold on the Gifu had been mopped up (13:278). The Gifu was taken on 23 January (13:305).

A coastal offensive by the Second Marine Division commenced on 12 January and by the 18th the line had moved 1500 yards westward from Point Cruz (13:278). When the 25th Division completed the capture of the Galloping Horse, it doubled the length of the West front and enabled the Army to advance westward on a broad front without much danger of having its left flank enveloped (13:319).

General Patch intended to trap and destroy the Japanese in Kokumbona. He put a small blocking force astride the mountain escape route, leaving only westward movement along the coast open to the Japanese (13:320). By 25 January the Army had secured Kokumbona and began a push to the Poha River, which was secured on 26 January. The final phase of operations on Guadalcanal--pursuit of the retreating enemy--commenced 26 January. Only scattered stragglers remained on the island when Army forces moving along both coasts toward the western tip converged on 9 February (13:348).

The Japanese evacuation had taken place over three different nights. On 2-3 February one light cruiser and twenty destroyers evacuated the first group of 4935 men, at Cape Esperance and Kamimbo Bay. The second evacuation force

of the same size, picked up another 3,921 men at the same locations on 4-5 February. The final evacuation convoy on 7-8 February took 1,796 troops from Guadalcanal and Russell Island in twenty destroyers. The American land forces were unaware, until the afternoon of 9 February, that there were no longer any Japanese troops on the island (1:259).

The turning point for the Japanese Army came during the October offensive. It probably occurred on the night of "Dugout Sunday," October 25-26, when Major General Maruyama's final "death-defying night attack" produced only further slaughter for his troops instead of the expected breakthrough of American lines and capture of Henderson Field. The 17th Army was decimated during this offensive and its fighting power was never again as promising.

The turning point for the Japanese Navy came at very nearly the same time, probably on the morning of 27 October, when Admiral Yamamoto learned that the 17th Army had failed to take Henderson Field, that he had lost 203 fliers attacking Henderson during the past two weeks, and that Santa Cruz had just cost him another 100 pilots. After he advised higher headquarters to abandon efforts to recapture Guadalcanal he never again endangered his carriers in operations to support the 17th Army.

The turning point for the US Navy came a few weeks later, probably on 16 November, when Halsey saw the true results of the Battle of Guadalcanal (Third Battle of the Solomon Sea). He had finally cracked the Japanese line of communication and stopped the "Tokyo Express." Had Yamamoto's carriers been there, or had Kondo ordered a general retirement, or Tanaka withdrawn to reorganize, the outcome might have been different.

The turning point for the Marines on Guadalcanal came with the arrival of the 164th Infantry of the Americal Division. Those troops, fed into Puller's First Battalion, Seventh Marines position on the night of 25 October, prevented Colonel Ishimiya's 29th Infantry from achieving the breakthrough that would have put the airfield in jeopardy.

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### CHAPTER III

#### THE BATTLE OF DIEN BIEN PHU

##### Background

By 1953 France had lost sight of any clearly defined war aims in Indochina. French public opinion demanded a short-range solution--either total victory or destruction of the enemy's main battle forces leaving the Associated States of Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam to deal with Communist guerilla remnants. The Viet Minh strength was growing; they had seven well-trained regular combat divisions and one full-fledged artillery division. With the Korean War terminated in stalemate in July 1953, Chinese instructors and Chinese-provided Russian and American equipment began to arrive in North Vietnam en masse. It therefore became imperative for the French to destroy at least a large part of the enemy's main battle force as rapidly as possible. To do this, the French must engage the enemy in a set-piece battle, by offering the Viet Minh a sufficiently tempting target, but one strong enough to resist the onslaught once it came (2:VIII-X).

The previous French Commander in Chief, General Salan, regarded the loss of Dien Bien Phu in late 1952 as serious because the access routes into Laos were now under Viet Minh control. On 30 December 1952, he issued Directive No. 40 ordering a counterattack for 10 January 1953, but

other commitments prevented Salan from making this counterattack. Before he was relieved, in May 1953 he stressed the importance of Dien Bien Phu to the Minister for Associated States, M. Letourneau (14:112).

#### French Strategy

In early May 1953, General Navarre was designated the Commander in Chief of French forces in Indochina by the French Prime Minister, who wanted an honorable way out of Vietnam which would allow the government to negotiate and bring the war to an end. Reinforcements were out of the question (16:6). On 16 June 1953, Navarre presented an outline to his commanders of the battle plan he intended to submit one month later to the National Defense Committee in Paris (2:31).

Navarre's plan to inflict maximum damage on the Viet Minh consisted of five points:

1. Reconstitute the Expeditionary Force during a period of restrained activity in which the main body of the enemy forces is avoided.
2. Continue major "pacification" actions in the Red River delta.
3. Prevent enemy offensive operations by smashing them before they were launched.



4. Destroy elements of the Viet Minh 5th military region in the Southern Highlands by means of OPERATION ATLANTE.

5. Seek a major set-piece battle by attacking first the enemy rice granaries, the reserves of men, and finally the main battle force.

As presented, the plan seemed a reasonable enough program. The Expeditionary Force needed to recuperate, the Red River delta needed attention, the Viet Minh in the Southern Highlands could be attacked by an amphibious operation in overwhelming strength and, once this foundation had been laid, the Expeditionary Force would be free to harass the Viet Minh main forces. Timing and location of the final phase were critical. If launched too early, it could over-commit Navarre's resources. If battle was accepted on unfavorable terrain, the outcome could be defeat of the French.

Although Colonel Berteil, an officer whom Navarre had met on his initial inspection of Indochina, had led Navarre into the error of thinking that the French fortified camp at Na San contained the seed of a new method of defeating the Viet Minh, Navarre's plan called for evacuation of the fortified airhead there in August 1953 (14:123-124). He had determined it to be militarily and

politically useless. Militarily, Na San tied down a light division and important share of available air transport without tying down an equivalent in enemy manpower (2:31).

Dien Bien Phu did not figure into Navarre's original plan and apparently he had no intention to effect Salan's Directive No. 40. However, at the 16 June commander's conference, Major General Rene Cogny, Navarre's commander in Tonkin, suggested the reoccupation of Dien Bien Phu. Cogny's notion was to secure Dien Bien Phu as a "mooring point" for far-ranging patrol activity which would keep small groups of Viet Minh away from the valley through mobile defense beginning up to 50 miles away (14:125). There is no evidence to affirm that Cogny expressed this interpretation to Navarre. Nor is there any evidence to show that Navarre made clear to Cogny at that time that he meant Dien Bien Phu to become a jungle fortress designed to withstand a regular siege (2:32).

On 17 July 1953, Navarre presented his plans to the French Joint Chiefs, who approved them with the reservation that all the additional forces and equipment Navarre required might not be available. The Joint Chiefs had recommended that "no obligation be put upon him to defend Laos" (2:33). His suggestion to establish an air-land base at Dien Bien Phu in order to retain Laos raised the question of the defense of that territory but it was not settled.

Navarre concluded he had been given carte blanche. In fact, the government of France would not say that she would not defend Laos, and she would act as if she were defending it, but without taking the slightest risk in the defense (16:18).

#### French Planning

Navarre's initial plan to reoccupy Dien Bien Phu--Directive No. 563 of 25 July--called for a light division to take Dien Bien Phu by surprise as a preventive action in the event of a communist thrust into the upper Mekong River. It was based on intelligence estimates stating that the Viet Minh could employ one, possibly two, lightly equipped and supported divisions in the Dien Bien Phu area (14:28-129). Also, Salan had left the information that the key factor enabling France to defend Laos was the impossibility of the Viet Minh's maintaining more than 20,000 to 25,000 men there (16:24).

On 12 August 1953, the 9,000-man French garrison was evacuated from the fortified airhead at Na San. Cogy regained control of nine battalions and a great deal of airlift capability. The evacuation heightened confidence within Navarre's staff in the ability of the French forces to occupy such an airhead and abandon it successfully when it was no longer useful.

On 22 October 1953, France signed with Laos a treaty of association which reinforced Navarre's determination to mount an all-out French effort to prevent another Viet Minh invasion of Laos (2:34-35).

On 2 November 1953, Colonel Berteil issued Navarre's Directive 852 to reoccupy Dien Bien Phu between 15 and 20 November.

Cogny's staff opposed the operation, believing that the Viet Minh could by-pass Dien Bien Phu and advance unopposed into Laos elsewhere. Moreover, the French garrison could be confined to a small perimeter and unable to conduct offensive operations. Cogny also felt anxious about the security of the Red River delta, fearing that unless an offensive was mounted there in the near future, the main French support base in Tonkin would collapse. With six of his battalions at Dien Bien Phu, such an offensive would be impossible. Cogny's rationale is a clear expression of Navarre's dilemma and Giap's strategy, but it ignored one important factor. The siege of Na San had tied down sufficient numbers of Giap's main force and consumed enough of his supplies to force a crippling delay on the drive into Laos. It was a great distance from the Viet Minh stronghold in northern Tonkin to the Mekong Valley. Any sizeable check en route could prevent the Viet Minh from reaching their goals before the next rainy season. Unless

Giap established a major forward base close to the Laotian border, and therefore vulnerable to French attack, he had to have uninterrupted passage through to the Mekong in order to conquer sufficient of Laos to avoid a complete withdrawal during the coming monsoon season. Thus, Navarre felt justified in continuing preparations for OPERATION CASTOR, the seizure by paratroops of the valley around Dien Bien Phu.

Navarre's airmen also objected--in writing--to OPERATION CASTOR on the grounds that a constant flow of supplies to Dien Bien Phu could not be maintained in view of the poor weather conditions that prevailed over the valley, the ease with which Viet Minh antiaircraft batteries could be set up around the rim of the valley, and the poor state of repair of transport aircraft. While fighters could remain overhead Dien Bien Phu for only a few minutes each, fuel cost, engine wear and crew times would be enormous. Navarre held that these objections could be overcome with determination by those in the supply system.

On 11 and 12 November, Cogy instructed the assault commander that the nature of the operation was to secure his mooring point and create an airhead from which could be established land links with French forces in northern Laos.

On 13 November 1953, the French government advised Navarre's civilian superior, the Secretary of State for Associated States, M. Jacquet, that nothing was to be risked

for the sake of Laos. Navarre was to ensure the safety of the Expeditionary Corps and adjust his operations to his means. M. Jacquet's staff sent an envoy, Admiral Cabanier, to pass the content directly to Navarre. On the 20th when Navarre received Cabanier's message that he was to reconsider his plans, he showed Cabanier the operation order for CASTOR, which had kicked off that morning, and pointed out that stopping the Viet Minh thrust into Laos would place France in a much better position to bargain for a peace settlement. Navarre now knew that he could appeal to the French government only at the cost of his reputation and he was well aware that he could expect little assistance beyond the overstretched resources of his command (14:129-132).

Despite learning on the 17th that three battalions of the Communist 148 Independent Regiment were operating in the Dien Bien Phu area and that the 316th Division was veering toward Lai Chau, and despite the advice of his airborne and aviation commanders against the operation, Navarre maintained his decision because, in Colonel Berteil's opinion, he wanted to block the 316th Division's move toward Lai Chau and he wanted to defend Laos (16:33). The assault went as scheduled, with over 1,850 airborne troops landing the first day; by the 22d of November there were over 4,500 troops at Dien Bien Phu (2:14-18).

In the face of a full-scale assault by a communist division of regulars reinforced by additional heavy elements, the French at Dien Bien Phu had a choice: either evacuate the valley or make it impregnable by transporting into it an adequate garrison heavily reinforced with firepower. Since there were only six battalions available for the operation, any compromise between the alternatives was bound to be unsatisfactory, if not disastrous. Cogy's orders of 30 November showed the effects of compromise. The paratroop forces were to be replaced with normal field units, the light entrenchments were to be replaced with permanent field fortifications. The new missions were to guarantee free usage of the airfield and gather intelligence from as far away as possible. The first meant that Dien Bien Phu was to be held without any thought of withdrawal and the second required the garrison to use at least half of its strength in operations to inflict heavy losses on the enemy and delay his laying a siege ring around the valley.

While the final strategic decisions had been taken to gird for battle at Dien Bien Phu, French radio intelligence learned that the enemy was shifting key elements of his main battle force--the 308th and 312th Infantry Divisions and the 351st Heavy Division--from staging areas toward the northwestern mountain areas. Cogy requested authority for a diversionary stab into the communist

area to slow down the Viet Minh build-up around Dien Bien Phu, but Navarre refused to consider it because force requirements exceeded those available by one third. Thus, Navarre's miscalculation that Na San did not tie down its equivalent in Viet Minh forces and his decision to evacuate it was beginning to bear fruit, for the Viet Minh. Seeing French forces concentrating at Dien Bien Phu and no longer threatened by them in the Delta, Giap was free to mass his forces for a set-piece battle.

By 3 December 1953, Navarre decided to accept battle under the following conditions: (1) hold Dien Bien Phu at all costs, (2) occupy Lai Chau as forces permit and, (3) maintain ground communications between Lai Chau and Dien Bien Phu as long as possible. The battle would have three phases: (1) a movement phase lasting several weeks, (2) an approach and reconnaissance phase lasting 6-10 days and, (3) an attack phase lasting several days, "which must end in the failure of the Viet Minh offensive" (2:39-44).

On 12 December 1953, Navarre also decided to launch operation ATLANTE in south-central Vietnam on 20 January 1954. It would be executed with a force of 25 infantry, 3 artillery, and 2 engineering battalions and build to a force of 45 infantry and 8 artillery battalions in a sector whose conquest was not vital to the outcome of the war (2:45-46).



The assumptions upon which French strategy at Dien Bien Phu was based had both political and military origins.

Political assumptions include the following (3:303-309):

The reason for accepting battle at Dien Bien Phu was the French government decision to defend northern Laos from communist invasion.

The evacuation of northern Laos, which would have made Dien Bien Phu unnecessary, would strain Laotian loyalty and would adversely influence French negotiations with Cambodia and Vietnam to join the French Union.

Allowing the Viet Minh to enter the Mekong in force would open the door to communist development in central and southern Indochina.

A successful battle at Dien Bien Phu would provide France with a cheap political victory over the Viet Minh (16:68).

The loss of Dien Bien Phu would not be a great political loss for France (16:102).

Militarily, a great many assumptions were made to enable Cogny's "mooring point" concept to evolve into Navarre's decision to hold Dien Bien Phu at all costs.

These include:

Laos could not be defended by a war of movement because of difficult terrain and the lack of adaptation by French Forces (3:310).

The Viet Minh 316th Division in Northwest Tonkin would destroy French-led guerilla forces operating in the Lai Chau region (3:309).

Reoccupation of Dien Bien Phu was necessary to eliminate the Viet Minh from the area west of the Black River (2:25).

The "hedgehog system" of fortified air-ground bases provided the only possible solution to preventing Viet Minh invasion of Laos (3:310).

The "hedgehog system" would work at Dien Bien Phu since it had produced the Viet Minh defeats at Vinh Yen, Mao Khe and Day River in 1951 and the French success at Na San in 1952 (2:24).

Dien Bien Phu was the best choice for a ground-air base in the area (3:311).

Dien Bien Phu would be used as a base from which light mobile units could conduct offensive operations against the Viet Minh in the nearby region (16:64-65).

The Viet Minh Divisions would be unable to move about freely in the terrain around Dien Bien Phu and could not be supported for very long while operating far from their bases; thus they could muster only a short attack (16:66-67).

The airstrip at Dien Bien Phu would always be available and French armor air-delivered into the garrison could crush anybody who ventured into the valley; thus, French control of Dien Bien Phu would never be challenged (16:66-67).

Air delivered resupply operations for Dien Bien Phu could be conducted without excessive losses (3:311).

French control of the heights around Dien Bien Phu was not essential to security of the garrison in the valley.

Viet Minh artillery would be on the reverse slope of the hills surrounding Dien Bien Phu. The distance from the commanding heights to the ground-air base at its center was greater than the useful range of any possible enemy artillery. Thus, the Viet Minh would be unable to bring his artillery pieces to bear on the airfield (2:324).

For the Viet Minh artillery to affect the French fortress, it would have to be positioned on the hillside descending toward the interior of the valley. Viet Minh batteries would be in full view of French Observation Posts in the valley while being positioned or fired. French counter-battery fire or bombers could silence Viet Minh artillery being positioned on or fired from the forward slopes (3:311).

The monsoon would seriously affect Viet Minh motorized resupply efforts but would have little effect upon French air delivered resupply efforts at Dien Bien Phu (3:320).

Viet Minh had reached his apex of strength (2:50).

Viet Minh capabilities as fighters, artillerymen and supply carriers were no match for those of the French (3:319).

French military genius, the invincible Foreign Legion, and superior firepower would prevail (16:79).

Rehearsal of French ground defense plans for Dien Bien Phu was not necessary: planned command and control measures were adequate (3:312).

The plans for French breakout from and/or break-through to Dien Bien Phu would not be executed (3:318).

The execution of OPERATION ATLANTE had nothing to do with the execution of OPERATION CASTOR into Dien Bien Phu (16:76).

The military intelligence reports from Hanoi were unreliable, the one Viet Minh division in the region could be reinforced but not multiplied (16:76).

#### French Forces

Navarre increased his troop strength/order of battle from slightly over 4,900 (6 battalions, 3 artillery batteries, 1 heavy mortar company, and 2 engineer companies) on 6 December to nearly 11,000 (13 battalions, 10 105-mm artillery batteries plus 4 155-mm howitzers, 3 mortar companies, a Composite Armor Unit with 10 tanks, a reinforced engineer battalion plus service, intelligence and aviation units) by mid-March 1954. Another 4,300 airborne reinforcements were parachuted in between then and 24 April, at which time there were 5,300 combat troops at Dien Bien Phu (2:Appendix A).

### Viet Minh Objectives

At the end of the 1952/53 season, Giap's forces were scattered all over Tonkin and northern Laos, remote from their main bases, short of supplies and exhausted after months of fighting across 100 miles of jungle and mountain country. It had been a successful campaign, in which the French had been forced out of western Tonkin and northern Laos, but Giap now had to plan his reaction to a possible French attempt to regain some of this country, while at the same time avoid being drawn into a major action (14:134).

### Viet Minh Strategy

General Giap's strategy was to create a number of widely scattered threats to French posts so that as soon as Navarre had collected a number of battalions in one area he would have to disperse some of them to rescue a remote outpost before he could proceed with his major offensive. This forced Navarre to launch OPERATION CASTOR with far fewer reserves than he had intended. In the Red River delta, Viet Minh regulars and guerillas engaged in an outbreak of ambushes, snipings, assassinations and raids. Viet Minh activity in central Laos was stepped up to create a major threat to Thakhek and Seno, the main French air base in the region. Main Viet Minh forces attacked key cities in the central highlands. Another offensive into northern Laos in early 1954 caused the French to stretch themselves

further to reinforce Luang Prabang. These four diversionary actions forced Navarre to concentrate his forces at five points sufficiently far apart to prevent mutual support or reinforcement and led him to believe that Giap's effort at Dien Bien Phu would be on a small scale, since his slender resources were committed elsewhere (14:135-137).

#### Viet Minh Planning

The key factor in Giap's decision to attack at Dien Bien Phu was the certainty that he would be victorious in wiping out the French Expeditionary Force there. This certainty was based on his having the force strength and firepower to win, a solution to his resupply problem, favorable terrain, the time to prepare adequately, an indifference to weather, the ability to retain the initiative, and the willingness of his troops to endure the hardships and casualties to achieve victory (14:140-147).

The key event that stimulated Giap to attack Dien Bien Phu probably was the French airborne assault on 20 November and his determination that the Expeditionary Force would garrison there. In late November, he ordered three divisions and a regiment to commence movement to Dien Bien Phu. He had learned in late November that the USSR had accepted Western proposals for a Big Four (Britain, France, Soviet Union and the United States) meeting at which the Soviet Union intended to propose a Five Power Conference,

including China, to discuss problems in Asia. Thus, he believed he could not count on being able to use military force against the French after any peace agreement on Indochina was achieved (14:138).

The decision to join battle at Dien Phu was taken in early December 1953 by Ho Chi Minh after a careful study of all the details of Giap's proposal presented at a meeting of the Central Committee also attended by Pham Van Dong, the Vice President, and Truong Chinh, the Political Commissar (16:68-69).

The key assumptions that Giap made appear to be:

Dien Bien Phu was the main feature of the French strategy for the coming months so they had much to lose by defeat there (14:139).

A threat to Dien Bien Phu would oblige Navarre to reinforce the garrison which could then be destroyed (16:69).

The French were not strong enough in the Red River delta to threaten his rear after he ordered the movement of his main battle forces to Dien Bien Phu.

It did not matter if he took considerable casualties at Dien Bien Phu between November and May provided he could inflict equal damage upon the French (14:139).

The Viet Minh main battle force could be concentrated and maintained at Dien Bien Phu long enough to achieve victory (3:60).

#### Viet Minh Forces

All present and accounted for, Viet Minh troop strength achieved 49,500 among four infantry divisions (308th, 312th, 316th, 304th), the 148th Independent Regi-

ment, and the 351st Heavy Division (Reinforced). The 351st Division included an Engineer regiment; a heavy weapons regiment with 40 82-mm mortars; two artillery regiments with 24 105-mm howitzers, 16 75-mm pack howitzers, and 20 120-mm mortars; an antiaircraft regiment with 20 37-mm AA guns and 50 .50 caliber AA guns; and a field rocket unit with 12-16 Katyusha rocket launchers (2:Appendix D). This battle force was supported by 50,000 porters using trucks, horses, sampans and bicycles to move supplies and ammunition.

#### Battle Results

The battle of Dien Bien Phu was lost when General Navarre made his decision to accept battle (2:51). General Giap overcame the obstacles presented by the strong points of the French defenses by means of "progressive attack" wherein he bombarded French fire support elements in concert with an infantry attack on a sequential series of hard points. He ordered the construction of a network of trenches that encircled and strangled the camp and allowed his troops to deploy and move under fire. His tactical plan to isolate and destroy the outposts enabled him to prevent any use of the airfield and to put observed fire anywhere into the French positions. Thereafter, he isolated the main artillery position several kilometers to the south of the

main base from the main defenses and ate them away one post at a time until they were reduced to a level which could not withstand an all out assault (14:151-152).

Viet Minh artillery proved impervious to French counter battery fire and to aerial strafing or bombing. Their careful positioning in shell-proof camouflaged dugouts had been so good that very few pieces were seen before or hit during the battle. The combination of AA and artillery fire from protected, camouflaged positions on the forward slopes of the hills was the major surprise of the battle for the French (3:316).

The Viet Minh overran the French fortress at Dien Bien Phu on 7 and 8 May 1954. The Geneva Conference began to discuss Indochina on the afternoon of 8 May.



## CHAPTER IV

### CONCLUSIONS

#### Guadalcanal

The Japanese plan to dislodge the Americans from Guadalcanal failed for many reasons:

The assumption that Japan could establish the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere with a war that she could limit in terms of space and time represents a near-zenith of provincial arrogance.

By advancing into the Southern Solomons and extending her defense perimeter beyond the range of adequate land-based air cover at Rabaul, Japanese planners violated standard doctrine and ignored a basic military maxim: A defense perimeter can be weakened by extending it too far from its strongest bases. That violation was both illogical and fatal.

Japan's failure to calculate the "cost" of trying to recapture Guadalcanal until it had already been "paid" was as much a function of "Victory Fever" and arrogance as it was of the Imperial Japanese Navy's misrepresentation to the Imperial Japanese Army of the results of Coral Sea and Midway.

Underestimating American military capabilities and intentions was probably the most significant error in Japanese thinking regarding Guadalcanal.

At the outset, Japan did not recognize the importance of Tulagi-Guadalcanal in the grand strategy as well as did the United States.

The Japanese could have built airfields in the central Solomons within range of Guadalcanal, but not after the arrival of American bombers there. The time for Japan to have completed and commenced operations from airfields on southern Bougainville was before or with the completion of the seaplane base at Tulagi. At the very latest, bases in the central Solomons should have been completed at the same time as the airfield on Guadalcanal was to be completed, August 7, 1942.

The Japanese Navy, Admiral Yamamoto in particular, understood the principle of mass, but was not inclined to use it to achieve a most desired objective; a small paradox. Japan wasted her navy at Guadalcanal, particularly carrier pilots and destroyers. She was unable, after Guadalcanal, to train aircrews and produce ships at a rate to match American military power.

Admiral Yamamoto's desire to achieve a "decisive battle" with the US Pacific Fleet could have been achieved at the Battle of Santa Cruz Islands. Had he pressed the attack, he might have eliminated Enterprise, the last remaining US Carrier in the Pacific, and taken Henderson Field.

Admiral Yamamoto erroneously concluded that the US Pacific Fleet was protecting a large headquarters complex at Ndeni and the line of communication Noumea-Fiji-Samoa and would leave the American garrison on Guadalcanal unsupported in order to defend it.

The Japanese habit of making overly elaborate plans with intricate tactical patterns caused the actual event in many instances to disintegrate under the weight of its own complexity.

The spirit of bushido wasted the Japanese Army on Guadalcanal. The virtue of unbending, unquestioning compliance with plans and orders, carefully worked out in advance by superiors, made Japanese Infantry patterns of maneuver and assault predictable, and therefore vulnerable to attack and destruction by an observant adversary with flexible and accurate artillery.

The Japanese Army failed repeatedly in its land operations because Japanese commanders--Ichiki, Oka, Kawaguchi, Maruyama--had extraordinary intellectual inflexibility and lack of adaptability to changing circumstances and previous experience. The inhuman tenacity and endurance of the Japanese soldier could not compensate for such shortcomings in leadership.

The Japanese Army's disregard of terrain, weather, and enemy capability in formulating its plan for simultaneous assaults on the American Perimeter at three widely separated points in the absence of reliable rapid communication is a classic error in military thinking. It produced disaster for Colonel Ichiki at Ilu, Major General Kawaguchi at Tenaru and the Ridge, Colonel Oka at Matanikau, and Lieutenant General Maruyama at the "centipede-shaped ridge" in the October offensive.

The denial by Japanese officers of factual data about the results of combat between Japanese soldiers--armed with rifles, bayonets and swords, and imbued with the fighting spirit--and Americans, armed with automatic weapons, machine gun, mortars, and supported by artillery, led them to repeat unsuccessful patterns of assembly and attack.

Admiral King's strategy to stop Japanese expansion to the southeast and open a third counter-offensive route to Rabaul worked, but it was a "close-run thing."

A Japanese deployment of 60 planes to the airfield on Guadalcanal, by August 7, would have altered significantly the outcome of the American invasion.

The Japanese assumption that daytime raids and nighttime bombardment would permit troop reinforcement sufficient to retake the airfield was incomplete in that it omitted the level of bombing and bombardment intensity required.

Both the US and Japan intended for their operations in the southern Solomons to be limited in scope.

Both the Japanese Army and the American Army were chary of providing aviation assets to support Guadalcanal.

Both the US and Japan correctly saw that Henderson Field was the key to the Guadalcanal Campaign.

In neither case, Ghormley's failure to command the invasion nor Fletcher's lack of knowledge and pessimism about the landing plan, did either commander reveal an appreciation for the importance of the Guadalcanal Campaign.

The myth of the Japanese soldier was both shattered and embellished. His mythical prowess as a jungle fighter was exposed when the Ichiki Detachment was annihilated. His endurance, tenacity, and aggressive, combative spirit were enhanced by each skirmish.

#### Dien Bien Phu

Navarre's strategy to seek a set-piece battle with the Viet Minh main battle force worked. He accepted battle at the place he chose, as did Giap. Giap's vision of the expected outcome was considerably more accurate. Navarre

thought he was causing Giap to respond to his initiative by reoccupying Dien Bien Phu. In fact, Giap was stretching Navarre further than his resources could handle

The pressure for a rapid solution in Indochina and the opportunity presented at Dien Bien Phu influenced Navarre to rationalize and adopt a great many erroneous assumptions. He exceeded the limits of his military power against the wishes of his government. He had alternatives available that he did not use. For example, he (1) could have evacuated Dien Bien Phu in early December and used the French Expeditionary Force to expand, or at least consolidate, his control in the Red River delta since Giap's divisions were already on the move west. He (2) could have cancelled or delayed ATLANTE and used the forces to take key terrain at Dien Bien Phu. He believed past successes with the "hedgehog" system would attain at Dien Bien Phu and he completely overlooked the importance of key terrain as a factor in his decision to accept battle at Dien Bien Phu.

Giap enjoyed unity with his leader and within his main battle force. He was certain of what he intended to do at Dien Bien Phu and his strategy was fully in congruence with DRV national objectives. He stayed within the limits of his military power and considered alternatives to his protracted battle plan. He successfully preserved the

support of the home front despite serious stress created by the siege. He learned from his previous experiences as shown by his conservative approach to a protracted battle.

The French beat themselves at Dien Bien Phu because they lost sight of any clear war aims in Indochina. The French government's failure to provide Navarre with clear and timely direction and Navarre's failure to demand an unambiguous statement of French policy enabled him to develop and pursue unilaterally a strategy that produced a debacle.

The Navarre Plan, conceived in the absence of clear war aims from a government anxious for rapid decisive results, was riddled with erroneous assumptions that sealed the fate of the French Expeditionary Force sometime during the brief fortnight between 27 November and 7 December 1953, over three months before the siege began (2:51).

Navarre's underestimation of Viet Minh capabilities was his real error. The substitution of preconceived ideas for verified intelligence to the contrary and the rejection of unpopular facts, e.g., the size of the Viet Minh battle force, contributed to the creation of numerous assumptions that were erroneous. It was upon these erroneous assumptions that Navarre constructed his strategy and his battle plan for Dien Bien Phu.

The overestimation of French military capability, specifically those of airlift and artillery counter-battery fire as well as the efficacy of the "hedgehog" system left the French with much less than was required for success in the critical moment.

The disregard of significant limitations on their own military capabilities, such as the monsoon weather and the high ground surrounding the Dien Bien Phu Valley, generated additional erroneous assumptions which collectively amounted to delusion and incompetence.

The choice of terrain not having a reasonable means of retreat and the failure to plan adequately for such an eventuality, as well as the failure to organize and prepare the ground adequately for sustained defense, were prime contributors to the complete defeat of the French Expeditionary Force.

Navarre's decision to accept battle instead of evacuate in the knowledge that his force would be facing at least four divisions of Viet Minh regulars best defines the point at which the battle was lost.

Giap could have made mistakes that would have produced defeat but he was cautious and conservative enough to develop a plan that he could execute with the means at



hand. His ploys to separate Navarre's forces and concentrate his force against one portion of them represents classic, sound strategy.

The Viet Minh use of deception and camouflage enabled Giap to achieve strategic and tactical surprise. The unity that existed within the Viet Minh main battle force enabled Giap to overcome significant logistic obstacles but in the end it was French errors of judgement and faulty thinking born of arrogance and political disorientation.

#### Summary

War is a matter of vital importance to the state; the province of life or death; the road to survival or ruin. It is mandatory that it be studied thoroughly.

- Sun Tzu

Errors in military thinking are seldom, if ever, new ones. They all have been made before. When made under benign circumstances, they can slip by unnoticed; when made before a determined adversary, they can produce disaster. They are as avoidable as they are common. They can be traced to the assumptions that a commander makes in preparing for war. These assumptions include those written into war plans, those unwritten assumptions of which he is aware, and those of which he is not.

By looking at assumptions that were, or seemed to be, in effect before a military conflict and then reviewing the outcome, some classic errors in military thinking reappear.

Taking unity of purpose, or lack of it, for instance; it is clear the French government in Paris had a different idea about the defense of Laos than did General Navarre in Saigon. Navarre assumed he had "carte blanche" to defend Laos and elected a place called Dien Bien Phu to establish a ground-air base from which he could move to block Viet Minh movement into Laos. The Japanese military suffered considerably because a lack of unity existed within Imperial General Headquarters. The Army Section assumed that the reports from the Navy Section on the status of ships, both Japanese and US, were accurate. They weren't, and the Army Section's assumptions about American troop strength and reinforcements on Guadalcanal were completely unrealistic. As a result, the Ichiki Detachment and the Kawaguchi Force were wiped out, a lot of bad things happened to Lieutenant General Maruyama's Sendai Division, and the 38th Division was literally "blown out of the water" before it reached Guadalcanal.

Commanders frequently underestimate their opponent and overestimate their own capability. The French thought themselves, and those they trained, to be superior in all

aspects of the military art. Contempt for a competent and determined adversary is dangerous. Thus, was Navarre unwilling to replace the preconceived notion that the Viet Minh couldn't operate independently for long periods of time away from home base with the uncomfortable facts that the 316th and 351st (Heavy) divisions were headed west from the delta shortly after his troops landed at Dien Bien Phu. Navarre was certain that the firepower of his Force would overwhelm any Viet Minh foolish enough to attack. But it was the focused, concentrated firepower of General Giap's troops, executing his "progressive attack," eating away the French base at Dien Bien Phu one post at a time, that eventually was overwhelming.

Another classic error in military thinking is disregard for the terrain, the enemy, and the weather. Major General Kawaguchi drew up his plan to attack the Marine Perimeter while he was still in the Shortlands. He assumed there was a relationship between his textbook view of the situation from the Shortlands and the malarial, fecaloid reality of the jungle on Guadalcanal. The French assumption that control of the heights around Dien Bien Phu was not essential to security of the garrison in the valley clearly is one of the more blatant errors in military

thought, but it is useful as a means of confronting the arrogance, inflexibility of mind and, obstinacy that is often associated with such errors.

Failure to consider adequately alternative courses of action available has been an error made by more than one commander. Navarre could have evacuated Dien Bien Phu after he learned the size and capability of the forces that Giap was moving in Navarre's direction. He could have "thrown Giap with his own weight" had he evacuated, landed in the delta, and wreaked havoc in Giap's rear area sanctuaries. More practically, he could have reviewed more closely his plans for retreat from Dien Bien Phu. As it happened, few were helped by a plan so unworkable that it offered little more than a false sense of security to the garrison. The Japanese evacuation of Guadalcanal is a counter-example, in that it was an amazing feat, almost impossible to explain. It was a carefully planned and masterfully executed evolution that enabled over 10,650 troops to fight another day. But it raises the question of what assumptions had the Americans made about Japanese 17th Army capabilities. Were they capable of striking the airfield during the last days of January?

Classic errors in military thinking are not exclusively the domain of developing or technologically inferior nations, nor of the superpowers. They are not the

birthright of any particular combat arm, service or specialty. They are as prevalent in our thinking about infantry platoon tactics as in our thinking about aerospace strategy. They are common to all who do not choose to avoid them. The key to confronting the presence of errors in military thinking is to look carefully at the assumptions that are in effect; stated, and unstated, but operative.

# APPENDIX

## APPENDIX A

### TROOP STRENGTH ON GUADALCANAL-TULAGI JUL 42-FEB 43

DATE	<u>JAPANESE</u>		<u>AMERICAN</u>	
	<u>AMERICAN</u> <u>ESTIMATE</u>	<u>ACTUAL</u> <u>STRENGTH</u>	<u>JAPANESE</u> <u>ESTIMATE</u>	<u>ACTUAL</u> <u>STRENGTH</u>
16 JUL	3,100	(13:30)		
20 JUL	8,400	(13:44)		
30 JUL	7,125	(13:37)		
7 AUG		3,010 (13:50)	1,000 (13:93)	16,000 (1:184)
		2,980 (15:28)	2,000 (4:44)	
		2,650 (1:184)		
20 AUG		3,600 (15:28)		16,000 (15:28)
8 SEP	7,000	(13:114)		
		6,000+(13:95)		
12 SEP		6,000 (15:28)		6,000 (15:28)
19 SEP			7,500 (13:135)	19,000+(13:13)
30 SEP				22,511 (13:125)
MID OCT	22,000-26,000	(10:189)		
		20,000 (13:139)		
23 OCT		22,000 (15:28)		28,000 (15:28)
25 OCT			10,000 (8:198)	27,700 (13:142)
12 NOV		30,000 (13:228)		34,000 (15:28)
1 DEC				35,000 (17:213)
9 DEC		25,000 (15:28)		40,000 (15:28)
MID DEC	9,100-16,000	(13:229)		
		25,000 (13:214)		48,000 (10:262)
7 JAN 43				50,078 (13:219)
EARLY JAN		25,000 (13:254)		
1 FEB		12,000 (15:28)		50,000 (15:28)
9 FEB		-0-		50,000

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